

PROHIBITION AGENT No 1

By

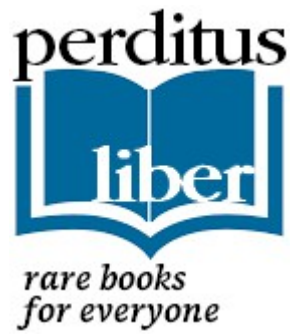
IZZY EINSTEIN

FORMER PROHIBITION SLEUTH



**The startling and humorous disclosures of
America's most famous prohibition agent.**

With an Introduction by **STANLEY WALKER**
City Editor, New York *Herald Tribune*



Perditus Liber Presents
the



OCLC: 1300718

book:

Prohibition Agent No. 1

by

Izzy Einstein & Stanley Walker

Published 1932

PROHIBITION AGENT NO. 1



“Ranchman” Izzy Einstein in El Paso, Texas.

PROHIBITION AGENT NO. 1

By

IZZY EINSTEIN

Former Prohibition Sleuth

With an Introduction by

STANLEY WALKER

CITY EDITOR, N. Y. HERALD TRIBUNE



*With fifteen reproductions in
black-and-white from photographs*

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
NEW YORK

MCMXXXII

COPYRIGHT, 1932, BY IZZY EINSTEIN

*All rights reserved. No part of this
work may be reproduced without the
written permission of the publishers.*

Printed in the United States of America

To
THE 4,932 PERSONS I ARRESTED
HOPING THEY BEAR ME NO GRUDGE
FOR HAVING DONE MY DUTY

CHIEF JUSTICE TAFT, in handing down the Court's decision, stated as follows:

“What Einstein saw and ascertained was quite sufficient to warrant a man of prudence and caution and his experience in believing that the offense had been committed of possessing illegally whiskey and intoxicating liquor and that it was in the building he described.

“The decree is affirmed.”

“He has indicated his fitness for the performance of the duties of the position and his zealousness and efficiency have become proverbial.”

LOUIS MARSHALL.

PREFACE

WHILE I was still a Prohibition agent I announced I was going to write a book about my experiences, but I was warned not to. My chief informed me that such a thing would be contrary to regulations—no employee of the department could keep his job and write about it at the same time.

I was disappointed. And so were some of the newspapers, apparently. About forty of them, from coast to coast, carried a story about the Book That Might Have Been. Some papers even had editorials about it, saying such things as:

“Izzy could write a first-hand thriller.” (*Brooklyn Eagle*.)

“In England some popular memoirs were written by the ‘Gentleman with a Duster.’ Izzy might write as the ‘Gentleman with a Mop.’ ” (*New York World*.)

“In these days, when liquor is on nearly every lip, the story of Izzy’s disguises, his raids and captures, and the strange devices of moonshiner, bootlegger, and dry

ix

agent, would be great reading. Izzy’s book might easily become one of the six best sellers.” (*Detroit News*.)

“That book of his certainly would have had some kick.” (*Detroit Free Press*.)

“Izzy’s literary ambitions are to be quashed, and from the world is being withheld a book that might have been placed among the world’s greatest humor.” (*Providence Journal*.)

Well, rather than deprive the world *that* badly, I have now written the book—now that I am no longer an agent and am free to tell the inside story of my experiences with the bootlegging profession.

What particularly stirred me to write it was all this talk that’s going on nowadays about Repeal being just around the corner. In my humble opinion such predictors are guessing wild. The day when Prohibition is repealed will not be in our lifetime. And I’m not looking forward to dying soon.

I say this not to bid for either your approval or your goat, but just as some one who has been in the thick of Prohibition as it really is, and not

merely looking on at it from a personal angle. If the facts I reveal happen to muss up anybody's pet theories, I'm sorry. My main purpose is to entertain the

x

reader with a rather unusual line of experiences and adventures.

IZZY EINSTEIN.

167 Ridge Street,
New York City,
September 20, 1932.

xi

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Introduction	xvii
I. Not the Type	1
II. Wits Vs. Wits	12
III. “Comic Opera Disguises”	27
IV. Sob Stuff	47
V. Soup-and-Fishing Along Broadway	55
VI. The Limelight of Secrecy	72
VII. Tips, Squeals, and Squawks	86
VIII. Sinful Suds	99
IX. A Shirtful of Whiskey in Rhode Island	108
X. Peculiar Places	120
XI. Sacred and Profane Wine	133
XII. Beaches and Roadhouses	154
XIII. Prescription Pads and Drugless Drug Stores	163
XIV. Izzy Bizzy Upstate	181
XV. Squelching Yodels in Yorkville	190
XVI. Mopping the Wetness of Motor City	202
XVII. Horses of Another Color	215
XVIII. Just Plain Luck	224
XIX. Moist Mobile and Fizzy New Orleans	234
XX. Hops and Skips	252
XXI. Conclusion (or Draw Your Own)	258

ILLUSTRATIONS

“Ranchman” Izzy Einstein in El Paso, Texas *Frontispiece*

The Silk Exchange Restaurant, located on the ground floor of a Fourth Avenue skyscraper, kept its supply on the roof 40

Mr. Wayne B. Wheeler, of the Anti-Saloon League, conferring on plans for keeping the Democratic Convention of 1924 dry 41

Respectable neighborhoods sometimes yielded peculiar surprises 41

The art of cutting, bottling and labeling—as practiced in South Brooklyn, near the Raymond Street Jail 72

Some “real German Kümmel” of the kind sold as “just off the boat” 73

A little discovery in a select residential section of Mount Vernon, N. Y. Three large stills were running full blast 88

To find moonshine outfits I didn’t have to go to the mountains 89

Some high-power salad dressing in the basement of the Pure Olive Oil Company on Chrystie Street 120

All set for visiting an Albany coal yard that sold liquid fuel as a side line 152

Moving day at Feuer’s Warehouse in Yonkers 153

The author and a lady preacher from Omaha share honors as the featured speakers at a temperance rally 200

Entertained as a guest of the Universal Movie studios, Los Angeles, California, where they asked my advice on the details of a saloon scene 201

The U. S. Commissioner in Mobile and some of the cases I brought him 232

Just after the big raid in Mobile, Alabama 233

xv, xvi

INTRODUCTION

THOSE of us who had known and loved Izzy Einstein back in the old days when prohibition was just a new toy were astounded, to phrase it mildly, when we were told that the Master had written a book. But the more we thought of it, the better the idea seemed. It was simply that, wrapped as we were in contemplation of the man's amazing versatility, we had not dared imagine him as a writing man. But it turns out that he is a writing man, and a good one.

He is more. This man of a thousand disguises, who single-handed, almost, held back for a long time the legions of the rum demon, takes high rank as raconteur, adventurer, psychologist and social commentator. It is to many of us a sad thought, but when he says that there are 100,000 speakeasies in New York, his word carries weight. And when he says that prohibition is here to stay, there is something in the ring of authority with which he says it that makes one wonder if, after all,

xvii

such a great man as Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler may not be wrong in his optimism.

The days when the incomparable Einstein roamed New York, raiding right and left, disguising himself in all manner of hilarious get-ups, belong to a fabulous period. It seems incredible. Here was a dry agent who actually raided! If every agent had been as industrious, as capable and as intelligent as Izzy, this country would be dry to-day, if the courts could have handled all the cases, God forbid.

Jealous critics, some of them in Washington, charged when Einstein was at the height of his glory that he was a creature of publicity, an amusing but improbable product of the imagination of newspaper reporters. A gross underestimate of the man! His right to fame may be established by any one who cares to examine the records of the prohibition enforcement arm of the Federal government. There, moldering in the archives, lie the proofs of the man's greatness.

As for the insinuation that reporters gave Izzy more play than he deserved, the evidence in Izzy's book alone would be enough refutation. He performed a great many

xviii

valiant deeds which he describes here for the first time. How could the agencies of publicity ignore the man? As well ignore a comet. True, reporters welcomed news of the deeds of Izzy, and fattened upon his heroic and ingenious exploits. They might have resented his raiding of Jack's, the famous Sixth Avenue restaurant, but they never held a grudge against Izzy. There are men now living who were reporters when Izzy was at the zenith of his amazing career—Frank Sullivan, now a grumpy recluse, who wrote of Einstein in the *Evening Sun*; Walter Davenport, Edwin C. Hill and Thoreau Cronyn, who were on the old *Herald* under the Munsey ownership when the great man was at his raids; Lindsey Denison and Martin Green, who wrote columns about him for the *Evening World*; O'Neill and Don Clarke for the morning *World*; Alva Johnston, Russell Porter and Bruce Rae, who were on the *Times* in that gaudy period; Boyden Sparkes and Frederick B. Edwards, then on the *Tribune*. All these can attest that Izzy was no myth.

Izzy Einstein almost made prohibition popular. It may be argued, and with considerable

xix

plausibility, that the turn of the tide against prohibition came when Izzy, rather than be shifted to the West, away from his beloved home in Ridge Street on New York's lower East Side, decided to retire from the wars, hang up his disguises and go into business. With Izzy gone, the enforcement of prohibition became somehow a humdrum, unpleasant and sometimes sinister affair. He stood out among the other dry agents of his day, for most of them were either slothful or venal. They are not much better to-day.

What Izzy brought to prohibition enforcement (and this is something which not even his greatest admirers, including the late Wayne B. Wheeler, quite appreciated) was the spirit of fun, of buffoonery. There are a few convinced prohibitionists among the dry agents who conduct raids and lock up bootleggers because their hearts are in the cause—not many, but a few. But this fanatical pleasure is vastly different from the sheer joy experienced by Izzy when, disguised as a musician, a waiter, a drummer, a mill hand or a visiting buyer, he betrayed the evil-doers. He was not bitter against booze, but it was fun to be in the tricky business of catching

xx

the violators. He made raids before dawn, when he didn't have to. One Sunday he raided seventy-one places!

We have come a long way from those early days. There was never a man like this paunchy Austrian Jew. Why, he actually made friends with many of the men he arrested. He had courage. He was in many tight spots, but he never carried a gun. He never descended to some of the unspeakable dodges which his colleagues later used to bring the law enforcement methods into disrepute. He was never a hip-slapper or a man who grabbed flasks from a table in the midst of a party. His memoirs, amusing and packed with detail and shrewd observation, will bring back sweet memories to those who lived and drank and loved in the early twenties, when the dream of a dry America was, it seemed for a time, about to come true.

Izzy is now an insurance agent and at last accounts was living happily with his family. As family man, detective, wisecracker and creature of boundless ingenuity, Izzy ranks among the admirable characters of our time. Certainly he is the most engaging snooper in

xxi

history. The saga of his term as dry agent will outlive that more formidable but less meaty document, the Wickersham report.

STANLEY WALKER.

City Editor,
New York *Herald Tribune*.

xxii

PROHIBITION AGENT NO. 1

PROHIBITION AGENT NO. 1

CHAPTER I

Not the Type

THE Eighteenth Amendment, ratified by forty-six of the forty-eight states* (all but Connecticut and Rhode Island), went into effect January 16, 1920. America was dry! People sort of held their breath, wondering what this new America would be like.

I didn't waste any time wondering; instead, I went down to the Custom House, where the Southern New York division of the Federal Prohibition Bureau had its headquarters, and applied for a job as an enforcement agent. It seemed to me a good chance for a fellow with ambition.

But the reception I got wasn't any too encouraging. Mr. James Shevlin, the Chief Agent, looked me up and down and in the

*New Jersey came in on the freight"—March, 1922.

middle—for I had very much the same sized middle I carry now—and decided I “wasn't the type.” I didn't look like a detective.

I tried to argue with him, to make him see that there might be some advantage in not looking like a detective: you could fool people better. But he came back at me by asking what I knew about detective work anyhow; had I ever had any training in that line, any experience?

Well, I hadn't. For the past few years I'd been a postal clerk, and previous to that I'd been a salesman—behind the counter and out on the road. I insisted that even though I had no gumshoe experience to offer, I *did* know something about *people*—their ways and habits—how to mix with them and gain their confidence. And I proved it to him by getting *him* interested.

I sold him on the idea that this Prohibition detective work, was a new kind of job, entirely different from the old game of tracking thieves and

murderers, and maybe a type like me, that would never be spotted as a sleuth, could get results that the regular plainclothesman couldn't.

Anyhow he hired me.

2

Then, to test out my nerve, he said:

"I must warn you that this isn't exactly a safe line of work you're taking up. You are liable to run into anything. For example, don't be surprised if some law-violator gets nasty and tries to split a bottle on your head."

I assured him I wouldn't let myself be too surprised if that happened.

But my family were in a panic at hearing of my change in government jobs—from a safe, reliable one in the Post Office to one where bootleggers crashed bottles on your head. My wife asked me if I thought *that* was any business for the father of four children. And my father, who was living with us here on Ridge Street in the Lower East Side where I still live, felt more disappointed than ever that I wasn't a rabbi. That was a calling where people looked up to you, instead of throwing bottles, (Little did he dream, any more than I did, of the kind of "rabbis" that Prohibition would hatch! If I were *that* kind, I wouldn't be living where I am to-day: I'd have a ten-room penthouse and a Jap butler.)

Thanks to the commotion I caused at home, I went out on my first assignment feeling

3

pretty shaky in the knees. This place I was sent to investigate was a saloon in Brooklyn. The proprietor was selling liquor—we were positive of that—but he wasn't taking any chances on strangers. Several agents had tried him, with no luck.

Well, I went over there and sized the place up from across the street. I noticed that it was a run-down neighborhood, and that the people going in there were workingmen, poorly dressed. So I went home and rigged myself out in an old suit that needed cleaning and pressing, and I left my collar off. Then I returned to the saloon and this time I walked in at the heels of a regular customer. Mopping my forehead with a mussy handkerchief I asked for a near beer.

The bartender asked me if I wouldn't like a lollypop on the side, and there was quite a laugh at my expense. I explained that I was a stranger and didn't know the ropes nowadays in strange places; but, just to prove that,

even though the laugh was on me, I was no near-beer piker, I'd buy a pint of whiskey if it wasn't too expensive.

He sold me the pint, and I arrested him. He was too astonished to heave any bottles.

4

The reason I bought the pint flask instead of just having him pour me a drink at the bar was that the liquor had to be carried away in a form that could be shown in court as evidence. Liquor you drink may provide evidence of intoxication if a cop smells it on your breath when he arrests you for reckless driving; but it's no evidence against a place that's violating the Prohibition law. When you charge a man with illegally selling you liquor, you've got to have the liquor, not in your belly, but in a bottle.

Thinking this over I hit upon a little invention. In the left side of my vest I rigged up an evidence-collector consisting of a small funnel concealed in my pencil pocket, connected by a tube to a little bottle hidden in the lining. Simple—but it did the trick.

Here's how I worked it. When a bartender poured me a drink of liquor I'd pay him and then take up the glass, the way a man does when he says, "Well, here goes!" Then he'd turn to ring up the money in the cash register, which was always located on the other side of his little promenade, where customers couldn't reach it. By the time he turned back, the glass of liquor was already

5

"tossed off" into the funnel and I was wiping my mouth with the back of my hand or, if this was a high-class place, with a monogrammed handkerchief—for your etiquette has got to match the kind of joint you're dealing with.

With a little practice I learned to "drink" so convincingly that anybody who watched me, unless he were right close beside me—and then I'd sort of half turn away—would think I really was drinking. But instead of going down the "red lane" it went down the funnel. And all I had to do then was to go off somewhere and take out the feeder-tube, cork the bottle, jot down the name, address and date on the label, and substitute a fresh bottle. Going around this way from place to place I collected samples of the law-violating that was being done, and a lot of saloonkeepers had to answer in court for what they'd poured me.

My chief, Mr. Shevlin, thought I was getting a bit cocky about all the arrests I was bringing in where some of his “professional” kind of detectives had failed. So he decided he’d have some fun with me. He handed me a letter that had come in from Roscoe, New York—a town I’d never heard of, up in the north corner of Sullivan County; it was a

6

complaint from an indignant citizen up there saying that a man in that town was flouting the law by operating a large still and selling liquor. But no name or address was given. And the letter wasn’t signed.

Ordinarily there wasn’t much attention paid to anonymous complaints—you could tell from the way they read that they were the work of cranks or nuts. But this one sounded as though it might have some truth behind it; and also it gave Mr. Shevlin a chance to cure me, as he thought, of my idea that I was pretty good. So he told me to go up there and “get” this still.

“I’ll get it,” I said, “and the fellow that’s running it.”

Accordingly I crossed the Hudson and did my first “special traveling” for the government in an old Ontario & Western day coach, the train climbing for hours up through the mountains. Finally I got off at the town of Roscoe, situated in a valley. Not a *big* place; but even a small town has a good many houses and buildings that might harbor a still. And you’ve got no right to invade people’s private property that’s being used for private purposes unless you’re armed with a search warrant

7

drawn up for good reasons. America isn’t Czarist Russia.

Well, I strolled around town without seeing any still in anybody’s front yard. Then I drifted back to the station and hung around there, yawning over the seldom-ness of trains. The freight agent, I noticed, didn’t have much to do between times. I got to talking with him, found he was something of a “character,” and he and I swapped views on the weather, politics, and everything else—but gradually I switched the conversation around to the subject of *freight*: the different kinds of freight there were, and (what I was really after) the kinds of freight that came to Roscoe. I learned that besides the ordinary commodities that the people of a town of that size would require, there were some rather curious ones, such as surprisingly large consignments of raisins, prunes, and corn sugar.

I agreed with him that this *was* sort of remarkable for a town like Roscoe, and I asked him who in the world could have use for such stuff. Some grocer?

“No,” he said, enjoying my amazement. “Why, pshaw, a grocer couldn’t sell that many prunes and raisins in ten years.”

8

And he told me the man’s name, indicating where he was located.

That was enough for me. I found my man, bought some liquor from him, and then raided him with a warrant that was less anonymous than the original complaint had been.

On the strength of this success and some others, I was assigned to follow a second complaint from across the Hudson. A railroad company had reported that on the outskirts of Spring Valley, a town just west of Nyack, a fellow was running a sort of low-grade roadhouse and selling liquor. What brought them into the situation was the fact that this was right by their tracks; people coming out of the place in a cockeyed condition had been getting onto the tracks, with the result that there had been a number of accidents. So the railroad, tired of being sued by rum hounds and their relatives, had been kicking to the local authorities to have the place dried up. Apparently, however, it couldn’t be done: the fellow was too strong politically—you couldn’t touch him. Hence they appealed to us.

“That place,” I was told, “*must* be put out of business.”

9

But how? I took a ride over there to see how the land lay and spent half a day in and around town; then I came back and told the chief that it didn’t look so good.

“Well,” he informed me, “it’s up to you. I’m not telling you *how* to get him. I’m telling you to GET HIM!”

Puzzling over how to go about it, I happened to think of a friend of mine up in Yonkers who peddled pots and pans and other kitchen utensils, making his rounds with a horse and wagon. I decided I would borrow his outfit and do some peddling myself—on the other side of the river. The only trouble was I didn’t have a peddler’s license; if I appeared in Spring Valley offering pots and pans, I’d get picked up by the first cop I met, and if I showed my badge as a Prohibition agent to get out of being arrested—well, it’s funny how quickly news can spread. So I covered the

wagon with canvas and steered clear of the town, approaching the place I was after from the other direction. Drawing up at the door, I pulled back a corner of the canvas, took out two coffee pots that my friend told me were worth \$2.00 apiece, and I went in there offering to sell one for \$1.00. The

10

man was interested because of the cheap price, and called his wife to take a look at what the peddler was offering. She thought it was a bargain and I made a sale.

“Couldn’t you use the other one too, at the same price?” I suggested. “It’s a wonderful buy. I’m telling you, you don’t get a chance like this every day.”

They knew enough about coffee pots to see this was a real opportunity. But the man was a smart trader.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll take both. But if I give you business, you’ve got to give me business.”

So I offered to buy a drink, and he sold me one.

Two minutes later, his business was something he was out of—for I took him to the town hall, and about half the population came flocking to see what had happened to him. It was a regular holiday. People were still buzzing and celebrating when I returned to the Custom House in New York to report that the alcoholic spring in Spring Valley was dried up.

11

CHAPTER II

Wits vs. Wits

WITH less than two hundred agents to cover an enforcement zone that took in the greater part of the population of New York State with New Jersey as a side dish, it was up to every man of us to keep hustling. In fact, you might say that the door of opportunity for a conscientious raider to show what he could do was as wide open as some of the rum-dispensaries I pinched.

Anyhow Izzy (as the papers soon began to report) was “bizzy.”

I went after the places that were supposed to be ungettable. And got them.

For example, there was a saloon on the Bowery that “could see any agent coming”; you just couldn’t buy liquor there unless they knew you and knew all about you. Strangers might hint, ask, or beg for it, but not sight or a smell of hard stuff would they get—the proprietor preferred to turn away business sooner than take chances.

12

Knowing this little hobby of his and not wishing him to have unfriendly suspicions of me, I pinned my badge on the front of my coat and walked in there, asking:

“Would you like to sell a pint of whiskey to a deserving Prohibition agent?”

He thought I was a swell comedian. And sold me the pint.

“That’s some badge you’ve got there,” he said, tickled at how real it looked. “Where’dya get it?”

I told him I’d take him to the place it had come from. And I did—much to his surprise.

Other smart ones were just as easy. I nabbed a string of them with a simple device not an inch big, known as a Put-and-Take top. Remember those things? If you don’t I know of some ex-saloonkeepers who do.

Well, anyhow I took this little article with me into many a place I was after. I’d spin it on the bar, and either I’d get stuck for the drinks, or an agent working with me would get stuck for them. It made no difference, because either way it worked—and it always *did* work as far as buying

whiskey was concerned—the bartender and the proprietor would get stuck for \$1,000 bail apiece, in

13

court next morning. And the lock-up till then.

A battered Ford proved useful to a couple of other agents and myself in getting us into places as well as getting us around. We'd drive up to a saloon or speakeasy and rush inside asking for the loan of a fountain pen to write a check with. I'd explain that Lizzie was being sold down the river, and my companion, who was to write the check, would insist that the \$65 he was paying was a tough bargain because of the condition of the front tires. And I'd come back at him saying I'd guarantee they were good for another thousand miles at the very least. At any rate the deal would be closed and I'd accept the check; whereupon all differences of opinion as to the car's worth would be forgotten in the desire for a little drink in honor of Lizzie's new owner. And we'd get it. Likewise the fellow who served it to us.

Apparently almost any article would do to throw off suspicion. At a bier-stube in the Bronx I had a crutch under my arm. At saloons on the East Side I had a pitcher of milk as though I was just stopping in on my way home from the milk store. In Brooklyn I

14

borrowed a pail of dill pickles from a peddler friend of mine, and went the rounds. At some restaurants out at Freeport on Long Island I had a fishing rod. Whatever the kind of place, my carrying something seemed to O.K. me as not being "one of those troublemakers" that came empty-handed. Where they couldn't get sold to I could. In fact, the alleged difficulty of buying liquor, which many a man in our department was beefing about, was something I almost never met with.

One reason I got results was because I was able to pose as a foreigner in places where only foreigners were catered to. I could speak German, Polish, Hungarian, Bohemian, Yiddish, and some Italian, and I knew Old-World ways, particularly as regards money—which is something that people from the other side never part with recklessly; it would be against habit. An agent who butted in among such people and planked down a twenty-dollar bill of the government's money as if it meant nothing to him, would be giving himself dead away. That isn't their style.

Not the kind *I* used anyway. I'd pull out

15

a little pocketbook and sort of "pay with a pang."

One place where I dragged it out the bartender had informed me that the liquor was of two kinds—25 cents a shot, and "extra good stuff" at 75 cents.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Lemme see how much I got."

Opening the purse I took out a dime and two nickels. Stared at these in the palm of my hand, hesitatingly.

He let me have the drink for my twenty cents. A costly bargain for him.

Another reason for results was because I paid my visits at times of day when fellows like me weren't expected. Particularly in the early morning. I found that around dawn the bootleggers were less careful, figuring that agents didn't report for work till 9 A.M,—which was correct as far as the force as a whole was concerned. But not Izzy.

For example, one morning before daylight when the proprietor of a big saloon on Third Avenue opposite the Queensboro Bridge came to open up, he found me waiting there on the sidewalk. It was 4:40. I was rubbing my hands together and shivering.

16

"Good morning," he said. "I'm a little late this morning."

He was carrying a package and had trouble holding it while he unlocked, so he asked me to hold it for him. I did. And when he had opened the place, I told him I wanted a drink.

This wasn't news to him, and while he was pouring me one, he got friendly. Told me how he hid his supply—a trap-door arrangement. I was interested, and he pushed the button to show me, revealing all kinds of drinks. It was so clever, I might not have found it in raiding. So this was certainly luck.

And by 5 A.M. he was in jail. Selling to me had been his day's business. In fact, you might say he never opened up at all.

These early morning pickings were so good, I very often brought in as many as twenty or thirty cases when I came to work. Other men usually just reported.

Holidays were my busiest time. There was more wetness, and agents were off duty. When the first Fourth of July came around, my superior

asked me if I'd be willing to stick on the job and see how many places I could buy liquor in. I jumped at the chance of

17

showing what I could do, and he gave me the White Light district of Broadway between 34th and 72nd Streets. And just on my own, I took in, also, other parts of Manhattan, not neglecting the Bronx and Coney Island. While the regular staff had their holiday, I, assisted by special men gathered from different parts of the country, worked day and night. Got evidence in sixty-two places. Then raided them in one swoop. By 1 A.M. we'd served 50 warrants and were still going strong. Working right through till morning, we got every man on our complaint list except one. And he was dead.

In one of these places I found a large supply of liquor and arrested the waiter.

"Who got you?" a patron asked him.

"Izzy Einstein."

"Well," said this guest, "you couldn't have been got by a better man."

Sundays were another time when the mice figured the cat was away. At first the authorities hesitated to go in for raiding on the day of rest. But so many complaints began to come in—some of them in the shape of printed form letters from church people—that it was decided to tackle the problem.

As

18

a result, I put in some mighty busy Sundays.

Many of the letter writers had urged I be put on the job, and I wanted to prove they had the right idea. And I did, Sunday after Sunday, scoring as many as 71 arrests at a clip. To express my appreciation of their confidence in me I gave the members of the Calvary Baptist Church on West 57th Street (Doctor John Roach Straton's congregation) the pleasure of witnessing a noon raid at a nearby café—timed for just when they would be coming out of church. They'd been complaining about this place and here was the answer, hatchets and all.

A similar party at a cabaret place up on Lenox Avenue near another Baptist church brought me bouquets of flowers, tossed by two ladies driving by in a limousine. And I got cheers in many places.

But the most practical gift was handed me by a truck driver. This was twenty barrels of beer. I happened to be standing outside of a saloon at 974

Amsterdam Avenue when this fellow drew up and, seeing me apparently just standing there, asked me if I would mind keeping an eye on his truck while he stepped inside a minute. I said, “Sure,” and when he

19

came out again, I had a little surprise for him—along with the saloonkeeper and the owner of the truck who had shipped the beer over from Jersey.

Others receiving Sunday surprises included two colored men in Harlem selling gin in what was supposed to be a real estate office, and a fellow running a pair of 200-gallon stills in a place that announced itself as a headquarters for MINERAL SPRING WATER.

An occasion that called for special measures was the Willard-Firpo fight. Remember that affair? It was held at Boyle’s Thirty Acres, and the New Jersey enforcement bureau received instructions from Washington to keep the place clean of liquor. I was specially delegated to go over there and squelch the flood beforehand. I took a suitcase along, pretending to be a fight fan who had blown in early. Stopping in at one place and another—and they weren’t far apart—I had no trouble in buying liquor right down the line. In half an hour my suitcase contained 30 bottles and was nearly pulling my arm off, giving me the alcoholic staggers when I was cold sober. I could have filled a truck if I had had it. And in spite of all the

20

arrests I made on this evidence I don’t believe that conditions have changed much since.

New Year’s Eve, of course, was the biggest time. A lot of people were apt to feel that the lid was off, and law-violators took bigger chances because there was bigger money to be made that night. But that didn’t mean that the principal hotels and larger restaurants went reckless. *They* couldn’t afford to. Rather than take a chance on getting put out of business they contented themselves with providing ballrooms and dining rooms where people could eat, dance and be entertained; as far as drinks went all they supplied was ginger ale and mineral water “setups” at fancy prices. Merry-makers who expected to make merry had to bring their own.

And there were many who did. In fact, there were so many thousands of people flocking to places of entertainment carrying something on the hip or in a discreet package, that not even the Army and Navy could have stopped

them all. As for little me, I confined my attentions to actual sellers of liquor, and never disturbed any flasks either on or off the hip.

Some agents, though, sort of let the occasion

21

go to their heads. At one place a couple of them tried to grab a bottle of whiskey which a guest at a table had brought along. There was a scuffle and they got hooted. Personally, I never saw any call for such tactics. I did my work quietly and extended courtesy to any law-violator I had to deal with. If it was a high-class place I was pinching I'd sometimes even let the manager have time to collect his dinner checks so he wouldn't be stuck for the food he'd served. And often the arrest was managed so confidentially that it wasn't till next morning that people found out the place had been dropped down on.

Even in tough places I never abused my power. I used the name of the law and not blackjacks. And in my whole career I never carried a gun.

About the only time I can remember that any one ever pulled a gun on me was one night at a saloon on Dock Street in Yonkers. I had just finished nabbing five other places and I strolled into this one to make it six.

"Give me the best you've got in the house," I told the bartender.

He poured some out of a bottle of bonded stuff and said,

22

"Sixty cents."

I said, "You're arrested."

His name was Philip Tremble and he acted that way.

Just then the proprietor, a fellow by the name of Herold, came into the saloon from another part of the house and saw the little scene between Tremble and me. Pulled an automatic from behind the bar; she clicked but the trigger jammed. It was aimed right at my heart. I didn't like that. Grabbed the proprietor's arm and he and I had a fierce fight all over the bar, till finally I got the pistol. I don't mind telling you I was afraid, particularly when I found it was loaded with six cartridges.

Afterwards in court this fellow Herold, answering the charge of attempted murder, claimed he had thought I was a holdup man. Just a little mistake on his part. I'll say it would have been a *bad* one if his pistol hadn't known better.

The trickiest tight spot I ever got into was up the Hudson at Kingston. There was a hotel there opposite the railroad station where I figured I might make a purchase, but the proprietor was suspicious.

23

“You look to me like Izzy Einstein,” he said.

“Like who?” I asked, trying to pretend I’d never heard of myself. But he wasn’t to be put off.

“I’ve seen pictures of you and I’d know you anywhere,” he insisted.

I offered to bet him I wasn’t.

“Bet nothing,” he scoffed. “I know of a better way of settling it than that.” He went over to the sandwich shelf and came back with a nice clean plate on which was a ham sandwich. “Here,” he said, “eat this with the compliments of the house.”

I thanked him, took the sandwich and ate it. He didn’t see me blow the ham out. Convinced, he sold me a drink. Then I arrested him.

He was a rare exception, though, because it was very, very seldom I ever got recognized. People took me for everything else in the world except what I was.

For instance, a Third Avenue bartender I dropped in on greeted me as an old acquaintance. I found he mistook me for a truck driver who lived in the same block and we got along swell right up to the moment when

24

I broke some news of a professional nature. A few months later, when his trial was about to come up and he was still out on the thousand dollars’ bail that law-violators were usually held in, I paid another visit to his old stand. And there he was.

“Good evening, neighbor, he greeted me, again mistaking me for the truck driver.

This time it was second offense.

In Brooklyn a saloonkeeper named Martin Holtz, who had a place at 80 Smith Street, did me the honor of pasting up my picture over his bar. I was face to face with it when I arrested him. A year later I went back there and found the picture still in place. But that didn’t save him from being padlocked.

Still, he was more complimentary than another Brooklyn hooch seller. This fellow ran a large cabaret patronized by high-class trade. When the

waiter, whom I'd asked for a pint of whiskey, took the matter up with him, he came over to me and explained:

"I gotta be careful, because there's a lot of these Federal agents around making trouble. And, believe me, there's *one* of them that had better not show his face in here if

25

he knows what's good for him, and that's that guy Izzy Einstein I read about in the papers. If *he* ever came in here I'd split his head and send him to a hospital."

"Oh," I said, "you don't have to be afraid of him. He's a friend of mine." So he sold me a pint and next day he was out of business.

26

CHAPTER III

“Comic Opera Disguises”

SPEAKING of me in his best-seller history of the 1920's entitled “Only Yesterday,” Mr. Frederick Lewis Allen makes mention of my “putting on a series of comic opera disguises to effect miraculous captures of bootleggers.”

Well, I admit it. But if a fellow who's just been handed a place in history may answer back without being rude, I'd like to state that these “comic opera disguises,” while they *seemed* funny, and are entertaining to read about, were serious business as regards getting results that could have been got in no other way. And let me assure you the law-violators I arrested didn't laugh.

It was simply a case of having to contrive admittance into places where nobody even remotely suggestive of a Prohibition agent could possibly get received and sold to. I had to look like a safe bet to the bartender or the waiter or the head waiter—whoever it

27

was we were after. And I figured accordingly, doping out some disguise that would fit the place, time, and neighborhood. The consequence was, I caught places that had shown themselves to be 100% agent-proof.

For example, there was an establishment right near Van Cortlandt Park where anybody could buy soft drinks but only people who were known personally could obtain anything stronger. I noticed, however, that the patrons were a sports crowd—amateur athletes and fans. That was enough for me. On a Saturday in November I got together a little group of good men and true, and we rigged ourselves out in football togs, smeared with fresh mud. And faces to match. In this regalia we burst into the place announcing with a whoop that now, with the last game of the season over and won, we could break training.

Would any saloonkeeper refuse drinks to a bunch of football players in that state of mind?

This fellow didn't anyhow. And he discovered that *his* season was ended too.

A harder disguise to be convincing in was that of a colored man. But I attempted it because I was dead set on nabbing a certain delicatessen

in Harlem that was doing a land office business as a food store in name only. Located at 132nd Street and Lenox Avenue, it was in the heart of New York's Black Belt; which meant that any white customer would have been conspicuous there, an obvious outsider, with no chance of getting in on the little game that was being played. By putting a false complexion on my purpose, I managed to qualify as a neighbor, dropping in from time to time until I found out how the system worked. It was canny. You asked for a "can of beans" and you got a half pint of whiskey; "tomatoes" meant gin.

These sample purchases were so satisfactory, I called again, with a warrant and a truck, and this time I went in for groceries to the extent of 400 bottles of gin, three barrels of whiskey, and five enormous cans of alcohol. But my favorite was the dill pickles—a barrel of them—that bore a curious resemblance to 100 small gin bottles. The taking away of these high-powered foods caused much excitement among my Afro-American confrères, who acted as though I was taking quite a load off their minds.

With my face less evenly darkened I drove

a coal wagon through the upper East Side, stopping at sixteen saloons to peddle coal. Some bought and some didn't, but all of them sold me hooch. In fact, I was rather proud of my little trip, as it netted sixteen bartenders in one hour.

In the Bronx I wagoned my way with fruit and vegetables, ostensibly for the Saturday market, but the easy market in bartenders was so good, I got held up. They "pincha da frut" and I pincha da proprietor.

In Brooklyn—the North Fifth Street section—I drove an old-fashioned covered wagon calling, "Ice! Want any ice?" Numerous housewives, sticking their heads out of the windows, answered my cry and bought hunks. And, if I say so myself, my tong-work wasn't bad. But it was the saloons I was aiming for and I managed to do business with quite a few.

One barkeep, named John Osga, tried to high-hat me. When I asked him, "Do you know me?" he gave me a patronizing look and said,

"Only in a business way."

He got better acquainted before I was through with him.

Along the Brooklyn waterfront I was a longshoreman on various occasions with worth-while results. One fellow visited, an Italian, proved himself a man of ideas by using his cash register as a cellarette—the drawer was filled with little flasks. This interested me strangely. As a result, the last transaction rung up was a “No Sale.”

The advantages to be had by being a gas-fitter-about-town also appealed to me. I donned greasy overalls and went inspecting. Any place where I was offered real work to do, I immediately confessed the need of a different kind of wrench than I had with me, but before starting off to fetch it, a little drink seemed appropriate to sustain me on the way. In this manner I celebrated the first anniversary of National Dryness—January 16, 1921—by landing just forty saloonkeepers.

Taking a jump in the social scale, I became “Judge” Einstein for the purpose of visiting a café called The Assembly, located at 308 Fulton Street, near Brooklyn’s Borough Hall. This place drew quite a patronage of judges, attorneys, and public officials, but there seemed to be more law talked there than observed.

31

Anyhow I dropped in one lunch time, with a thoughtful frown on my face and a five-pound sheepskin volume under my arm. Laid this book on the table in front of me and turned to page 346, where the Whoozis Corporation were jurisprudencing for a change of venue.

While pondering thus deeply and partaking of a little halibut brain-food, I tapped the floor with my foot in an absent-minded way. It gave a hollow sound, which confirmed suspicions I had had, and prompted me to do something that was perhaps out of character as a judge. That is to say, I reached back for my trusty little hatchet and began prying the floor boards loose.

The proprietor, one Nicholas Middleton, came rushing over, alarmed at my lunch manners. Then he recognized who I was.

I said, “How do you do?” and went on with my plank work. And perseverance had its reward in the shape of six quarts of Scotch. In view of which, The Assembly was adjourned.

A medical career in Upper Manhattan was equally brief and to the point. Complaints had come in from Mount Sinai Hospital that

32

some people employed there had whiskey breaths. Even some of the nurses. It was felt that something more drastic than Listerine would have to be applied to the situation, and I was called in.

Hanging around there as requested, I noticed that fellows in white coats were slipping out of the hospital on mysterious errands to a place in the neighborhood. Next day I had on a white coat myself, and followed the trail. The place was just an ordinary speak, but so partial to us White Coats that the only question asked was, "What's yours?"

I said, "Gin."

Evidently this was less in demand than whiskey, because the bartender had to go into a back room, from which he returned with a pint flask and poured me a drink. I was about to do *my* little pouring act, into my pocket funnel, when I noticed the smell of the stuff. It was enough to take the tin off a tin can.

"Whew!" I said. "What kind of bath-tub was this born in?"

He took a smell of it himself and his jaw dropped.

"Gee!" he gasped, "I hope you didn't drink

33

any of it, because I certainly made a terrible mistake." Explained that this was his first day in a new job and that he was still a trifle mixed as to what was what. By an unfortunate error he had given me stuff intended for cleaning the brasses, under the impression that it was gin.

"Gosh!" he repeated, "it's lucky you didn't drink it."

I accepted his apologies and a glass of the genuine. Then I arrested him.

"I wish you'd drunk what I gave you first," he said. Which was hardly polite. But I was willing to overlook it.

I myself was given a lesson in etiquette at West Point, where they are awfully good at that sort of thing. Complaints had been received from there that liquor was on the loose just outside the grounds of the Academy, and I was assigned to do something about it if possible. Being built more like a general than a private soldier, and not feeling up to assuming too high a rank on the spur of the moment, I compromised by being a cigar salesman and took along a colored man carrying two large bags of samples. They were good cigars. And my sales policy was to

34

offer them at about one-third the market price. It assured me a welcome.

I made the most of this welcome at soda fountains, cigar stores, near beer establishments, barber shops, and similar places catering to the military. I went through the motions of writing up a lot of orders—totaling thousands and thousands of cigars—which are unfilled to this day. And I celebrated the securing of each order by patronizing the house to the extent of something for my funnel or my hip. Finally, when a warrant had been made out to match the label on each sample, a general roundup was sprung—complete as it was sudden.

The head of the Academy was so gratified at the drying up I had effected, he took me to the station in his official car. I thanked him as best I could. Unfortunately, not being much up on military matters, what I said was:

“Thank, you very much, Captain.”

Which hurt his dignity something fierce, because he was the Commandant of the place—a full-fledged Field Marshal or something. Why, actually, he wanted to have me court-martialed, demoted, degraded and everything else, if I understood his splutters correctly. I

35

might have been thrown in the guardhouse and missed my train, but for the fact that luckily I was in another branch of the Service.

Mindful of that social error, I was careful of titles when I posed as a student at Cornell—a college so “far above Cayuga’s waters” (as the song goes) that it was seemingly in a hooch belt. The academic authorities had complained, and I had responded by buying myself a pair of linen knickers, size plus four. In that studious rig I strolled the campus, playing safe by addressing anybody with a mustache as “Professor” and anybody with a beard as “Dean.” Maybe some janitors were unduly complimented. I don’t know. But I do know that a lot of alleged soda fountains flowed less freely as a result of my visits; and that by the time I left, any college boy or co-ed in search of booze had to travel some to find it. And I doubt that any of the “diplomas” I distributed were ever framed.

But right in Little Old New York there was still plenty to do. A street car company was complaining that their conductors and motormen were getting hold of liquor at saloons located near the car barns on Upper Third Avenue. The suggestion was made

36

that it would be a happy idea to put these joints out of business.

I tackled the job by outfitting myself with a conductor's uniform and cap, putting a ticket-punch in my pocket so the handle would show. In this get-up I dashed into one of the places at five o'clock in the morning—an hour when a lot of the crews are reporting for work—and I laid a five-dollar bill on the bar, asking:

“Could you give me small change for this—mostly nickels?”

The bartender acted as though I was asking considerable of a favor for a person who wasn't buying anything. So I bought something. And by repeating this money-changing stunt at seventeen other places in the neighborhood, I caught what might be called a pretty string of fish. And the dryness around the car barn became quite noticeable.

From down the bay, the shipyards of Staten Island were making similar complaints about places selling to their workers. So I dolled myself up in what the serviceably dressed shipyard worker wears, took a five-cent voyage down from South Ferry, and made a tour of Manhattan's big-sister island that is so close

37

to Jersey. Seven saloons yielded ten arrests. In fact, it was a good trip, you might say. Yet not so remarkable in results as an early one I made there. *That* time had to do with the arrest of a gentleman bootlegger who was a brother of a judge down there—the very judge who, under ordinary circumstances, would have sat on the case. As things were, another judge had to substitute. And a novel note was added by our arresting a cousin of these two embarrassed brothers, who was doing a tidy bit of bootlegging over in Brooklyn. But to go into all the angles and tangles of that affair would take us too far off the subject I'm trying to stick to, namely, disguises. So I'll just mention, before we get back to Manhattan, that on Staten Island I also pinched Hugot's Hotel at St. George, close by the Courthouse where bootlegging wasn't a tactful topic to bring up.

Speaking of hotels, on Fourth Avenue not far above Wanamaker's there was the Luna Hotel, reputed to be doing what it shouldn't. I dropped in there disguised as a department store driver and, after purchasing, delivered a little C.O.D.—“Come On Down” to the Federal Building.

38

Which reminds me that out in Cleveland I did some delivery truck driving for a so-called perfumery company which used industrial alcohol in interesting ways. But that, too, would be getting us far afield. So instead let me tell you about my experiences as a grave-digger.

I got into this not-too-lively profession for the reason that on Bainbridge Avenue in the Bronx, right opposite Woodlawn Cemetery, there was something peculiar going on in a two-story brick house. By resting on our shovels in the cemetery for a couple of evenings, another agent and I watched proceedings until we saw enough to base a search warrant on. Then we paid the place a surprise visit and discovered two big stills, each with a capacity of 100 gallons a day, being operated by a couple of lads who said they were nephews of the owner—a fellow named Libby who had been a railroad man and still lived near the New York Central tracks.

This brick house of his was quite a residence. It had large supplies of labels, such as “Bottled in Bond—Old Kentucky Whiskey” and “Canadian Club—Matured in Cask in Warehouses Which are Warmed During

39

the Cold Season.” Considering the fact that this stuff was denatured alcohol redistilled and “colored for the trade,” it struck me that Mr. Libby was going pretty strong on printed matter. He even had fake revenue stamps. Just how many customers he had fooled during the nine months of a year he had been operating, I’d hesitate to figure. But I’ll say this, that 200 gallons a day, at not less than \$8 a gallon, must have brought in quite a piece of change to a fellow who was paying his nephews \$25 a week each to make the stuff. So I guess we were busting into high finance when we hit there.

Right in the heart of Manhattan there was a lot of this fancy labeling going on, and our hunches about it seemed to get hotter in the region of lower middle Broadway near Prince Street. I noticed trucks around there delivering what might have been perfectly legitimate merchandise, except that you couldn’t see what the stuff was. As for the neighborhood, it was occupied mostly by machinery concerns displaying pumps, drills, hoists, and what not—all perfectly legal. But I felt positively certain there were other kinds of “equipment,” and not being sold but used.

40



The Silk Exchange Restaurant, located on the ground floor of a Fourth Avenue skyscraper, kept its supply on the roof.



Mr. Wayne B. Wheeler, of the Anti-Saloon League, conferring on plans for keeping the Democratic Convention of 1924 dry.



Respectable neighborhoods sometimes yielded peculiar surprises.

So I went into the machinery business myself. By picking up catalogues at one display room and another, I learned enough of the lingo to be able to inquire around for some equipment I “needed for my plant upstate.” It was a “sawmill,” a “machine shop,” a “small factory”—depending on whom I was talking to. After a week of this kind of talk I was a machinery agent bidding for territory. And acting that part, with an armful of catalogues, I applied at an office on the fourth floor of 427 Broadway.

Here I was received very differently. Catalogs? They didn’t have any. Their special line? Well, their business was their business.

But I made it my business to find out what was going on there. And I found plenty!—the most complete cutting, bottling, and labeling plant that had been discovered in New York up to that time. Enough genuine stuff—both wines and liquors—plus enough redistilled alcohol and coloring matter, to be able to turn out any kind of brand that a printer could print a label for. And you ought to have seen the place when we got through with it!—\$50,000 carted, away and the rest smashed to bits, together with all the

41

equipment. There wasn't a bottle left to put a label on. Not even a cork.

Getting wind of some more machinery not far away, I dropped in at a dairy lunch on Canal Street. This time I was a prosperous cloak-and-suiter with a fussy appetite. To make sure my steak was being cooked the way I wanted it, I stepped out into the kitchen. And there I found a big juicy still, going full blast. The chef said it was "something he made the coffee with." But I sampled the kind of coffee it was turning out, and my tongue got burned almost as badly as the steak, which was still on the fire when I arrested him and the proprietor and wrecked their outfit.

The Silk Exchange Restaurant, located in the building of that name, at 432 Fourth Avenue, was also rumored about as a place where patrons who were known could get liquor. I made myself "regular" by going there with a bolt of silk and an "out-of-town buyer" I was entertaining. We talked silk and Broadway shows he wouldn't mind seeing while he was in town. Then he dropped a hint that what he'd *really* like would be a pint of whiskey if he could get hold of one somewhere. I appealed

42

to the waiter to help me out; gave him to understand that this was a customer I had to make good. with. He fixed me up. Next day we fixed the restaurant, seizing \$25,000 worth of hooch—some of it hidden in the basement and the rest stowed "out of harm's way" on the roof, more than 17 stories above the Avenue.

A place that no outsider could get into and where booze flowed freely among friends, was a sort of club frequented by members of the Musician's Union. You had to have a Union card. Fortunately I was able to borrow one and I went there as a musician willing to buy a drink for anybody who would put me on the trail of a job. They asked me what instrument I played. I said a trombone.

“Play something,” they told me, “and let’s hear how good you are.” I said I’d left my instrument at home. But they borrowed one for me and there was nothing for me to do but play it, which luckily I could. I played “How Dry I Am.”

It satisfied them and they told me that if I’d come back that evening maybe they’d have a job for me.

Instead, I returned with a warrant.

43

An adventure as a violinist was more sensational. I had decided on staging a little party at a cabaret in Brooklyn, on Flatbush Avenue, but hadn’t yet made up my mind what I’d “be”—it was a pretty high-class place patronized mostly by college boys and girls—when the very idea was handed to me, so to speak. And where I’d least expect it.

It was in a terrible dump which had the reputation of being a hangout of coke-pedlers. I went there disguised as a longshoreman, looking for bum hooch, and what I found was that they were pretty slick. When I asked for a shot, the fellow running the place took an extra look at me to make sure, then he got a stepladder and climbed up and took down a violin-box that was hanging on the wall. In it were three bottles. A couple of minutes later I confiscated the thing complete. I thought it would be handier that way.

It certainly was handy. As I walked along carrying it, I was struck with the notion of how convenient it would be for collecting evidence. And that gave me my idea.

That evening I went to the cabaret as a violinist. I had another agent with me and we were both in tuxedos. At the door they tried

44

to get me to check my box, but I said the instrument inside was so valuable I’d rather not trust it out of my sight. Which made an impression even though the case was empty.

There were about 200 people there—eating, dancing, and drinking. I hinted to the waiter that we could use some “real stuff” with our food. He had to “make sure” before serving us, so he went over to the proprietor who had seen me come in with the violin case. He thought he recognized me.

“Hello, Jake,” he called. “Glad to see you. Enjoyed your music many a time.” He explained to the waiter that I was the violinist from the vaudeville theater down the street.

After a while he came over and, to jolly me and make me feel important, he said he'd passed the word around that I was here and the guests would like to hear me play something if I didn't mind favoring them. I said I'd oblige.

"Something by Strauss?" he suggested.

"No," I said. "I'll play you the Revenue Agent's March." And I opened the box.

He had a heart attack and they had to carry him away in an ambulance. A week later he died.

45

Which goes to show, as I said at the beginning, that my "comic opera disguises" weren't so funny for people violating the law. I wore them strictly for getting results. And they got me results.

Except in two cases. One time on a Palm Sunday when I was pulling off a big string of raids I went into an Irish saloon along with some people wearing pieces of palm leaf on their lapels. I wore a piece too. But that didn't go so good—they said I was no Irishman.

The other case was a place called Peter's Restaurant, on Greenwich Street. I went in there in all sorts of disguises without succeeding in buying anything. You absolutely had to be known and known personally, or nothing doing.

But I hung around there and was rewarded by seeing a patron coming out with a bundle. He was kind of wobbly as he stepped out of the door, and I, pretending to be going in, just "happened" to bump him.

There was a crash as the bundle hit the sidewalk. Then a trickle, trickle. Followed by a pinch.

46

CHAPTER IV

Sob Stuff

I FOUND that the liquor business was one in which I met up with few widows and orphans. The kind of people who did go into it knew they were taking a gamble and that sooner or later they would have to pay the penalty.

The oldest rum-seller I encountered was a man seventy-five years of age, old enough to know better, you'd think, but instead he seemed to expect special consideration on account of his age.

The youngest was a little boy of nine. His parents, who were bootleggers running a regular barroom, figured that I wouldn't arrest a boy of that age, and they were right. I just locked up the father.

Every sort of game to get my sympathy was tried on me. One bootlegger I arrested started to cry. Said he was a family man and I was ruining his life.

"I've had three years in prison," he told

47

me, "and now I've started to go straight."

I had to point out to him that his notion of "going straight" and the government's weren't exactly the same.

Another man I pinched tried indignation along with his heart throbs.

"This is my residence," he protested. "You got no right to butt into a private home and try to make trouble."

The only flaw in that argument was six hundred gallons of moonshine I discovered on the premises. Incidentally, this "Home, Sweet Home" he was living in was a stable; he was drunk at the time, and he had with him a frowsy woman who didn't look particularly domestic.

Some fellows when caught tried to bribe me off. The queerest instance was when I raided a man named Eberstein, on the East Side. He had ten barrels of whiskey, which had cost him probably \$1,000 each. Anyhow he said he'd put his life savings into them, and he acted heartbroken when all ten were loaded onto trucks. As the neighbors crowded around and hundreds of people stuck their heads out of the windows to see what was going on, he became more and more excited, telling

48

me in Polish that I was taking away his livelihood. Said he was going to commit suicide, and would rather give up his wife than the ten barrels. In fact, he wanted to make arrangements so I would take her instead.

I told him I'd rather have the ten barrels than any man's wife. Besides, I was already married and had four children. Even so, I had quite a time breaking away from there, and he followed me down the street still offering his peculiar proposition and I don't believe he'd stopped to consult the lady.

Another family man, named Kainz, from whom I seized a truck-load's worth at his place on East 92nd Street, was so upset that he attempted to hit himself on the head with a hammer. I prevented him, fortunately, and in turning him over to safe keepers, I made a point of telling them he'd better be watched.

In the case of a saloon at 238 East 4th Street, it was a wife that pulled the hysterics—screaming and carrying on, apparently in behalf of her husband, the proprietor, who was absent at the time. Her shrieks attracted a crowd of people and it took two doctors to quiet her down.

"I'm sorry," I told her. "But here's a paper

49

for your husband." And explained that it was something he didn't have to attend to until next morning.

The wildest women I ever had to deal with—*two* of them—were encountered at a joint in Brooklyn run by two brothers named Lasky, husbands of these battlers. I and a couple of other agents dropped in at this place, asked for drinks and were invited to come upstairs where we found ourselves in the bosom of the family, so to speak—both families. When we showed our badges, the four of them jumped at us all at once, and one of my companions found himself suddenly at the bottom of the stairs. In fact, we had quite a bit of difficulty in getting the men into the patrol wagon—so much so that when it was starting off one of the women, with a child in her arms, jumped up on the back of the vehicle for a parting swipe at us.

Quieter and choicer was a little surprise I had at a restaurant I pinched on West 17th Street. Discovered that the proprietor was none else than a fellow who had once been my rival for the hand of Mrs. Einstein. Technically I could have arrested him. But I decided it seemed better just to serve him a summons

50

to appear in court and let the law take its course.

Still another heart throb happening, and one that was commented on by newspapers all over the country, was when I announced my name to a negro bartender who was guarding 800 pints of Kentucky Dew—as I found out when he'd been revived from a faint that the bad news caused him to fall into. And by coincidence, that very same day a lighter-complected gentleman of the same profession took the count back of the counter and had to be attended by a doctor.

Commenting on these sudden passing-outs, the Boston *Transcript* suggested that possibly bartenders in New York were a frailer breed than the ones in Massachusetts. This editorial was so learned that I am tempted to quote it in part, as follows:

“At all times the law must be upheld, at all times must its brave supporters be encouraged, but it is with a feeling of pity and regret that we read that Mr. Bud Dixon, a colored gentleman tending bar in one of these places, just fainted clean away and in another the bartender, Caucasian, collapsed and had to be attended by a physician. Local patriotism is very well in its way, but the fair-minded Bostonian will have to admit that the bartenders of the modern Athens do not possess

51

such delicate sensibility. They might when apprehended betray some emotion, they might give a short piercing cry, but it is more than doubtful whether they would faint.”

But for real emotional displays, I'll never forget the time we poured \$100,000 worth of confiscated hooch into the gutter in front of the Knickerbocker Warehouse while police reserves held the crowd back from lapping it up. What thirsty looks! And what groans! Boy! the rum hounds certainly had their tongues hanging out.

This warehouse, located originally at 1st Street and the Bowery, and later moved a couple of blocks away when work on the new subway caused a general tearing down in the neighborhood, was the place seized liquor was put in where it wouldn't do any harm. Hundreds of bootleggers, fortunes were grimly trucked to the door of this place with the result that

the total quantity “jailed” here ran up into the millions of dollars. And not a single drop ever leaked out.

Skeptical of that statement? Well, there were a good many people who believed that Uncle Sam’s private liquor deposit was being slyly subtracted from as well as openly added

52

to. But that was just a rumor circulated by bootleggers selling what they pretended was “genuine Knickerbocker Warehouse stuff.” People bit and bought. There got to be so much buying and selling of this “Knickerbocker” hooch that finally the federal authorities became alarmed—for, after all, the warehouse was a private concern, and not government guarded.

So I and other agents were assigned to check the stock. It was an enormous job and took weeks and weeks. Every case was opened and every single bottle was examined to see if it had been tampered with. Every barrel was gauged and the contents tested to see if anything had been taken out or any watering had been going on.

The checkup gave the warehouse an absolutely clean bill. The only thing that could be found missing was a small hand bag, containing two bottles, that seemed to have disappeared somewhere, somehow. And a couple of weeks later even *that* item turned up.

Still, there was talk about the extravagance and bad policy of using a private warehouse for government purposes when the government

53

already had warehouses it didn’t need. So, after a few years of Knickerbocker efficiency, an economy move was made over to the big Army Warehouse in south Brooklyn, which had been built for embarking soldiers’ equipment during the war, and hadn’t been of much use since. (It’s down there back of where the *Bremen* and *Europa* dock.)

Unfortunately, the new arrangement brought more trouble than had cropped out before. But Uncle Sam always was a man of griefs and apparently he’s learned to accept them bravely. It’s the bootleggers who pulled the sob stuff.

Still, there was one bootlegger who thanked me. This fellow, with the aid of clever lawyers, had argued the case in one court after another and

finally had got the stuff turned back to him. And in the meantime, the market price for such wares had doubled. So he thanked me.

And well he might, because it was our raiding that had put the prices up.

CHAPTER V

Soup-and-Fishing Along Broadway

IF YOU know New York's Christopher Columbus—and he knows Broadway better than any columnist, standing there at Fifty-ninth Street day after day and night after night—you know his old-time neighbor, Reisenweber's, is no longer in business just a block below the Circle.

I hated to pinch it, but I had to.

Really quite a place this Reisenweber's. Catering to tired business men who disliked going to bed on an empty stomach, it gave you, for the price of admission and sundries, some one to sit up with, but not a sick friend. There it was that Sophie Tucker sang—in the days before she took the title of “Madame”—about red-hot mamas. Also (if you can remember back that far) New York's first jazz band, an innovation which preachers and musical critics denounced as a menace to morals and ear-drums. As regards alcoholic beverages, you might say that Reisenweber's in

55

its time had served a total quantity about equal to what the swans paddle on in Central Park across from the Plaza. But outside of that the establishment had no ideas as to swans, swan boats, or ducks (except with apple sauce). Reisenweber's certainly showed no desire to take to water when Prohibition came.

And that was the trouble.

Assigned to investigate the state of affairs up there, I figured I'd have to pass muster as a typical patron if I expected the door man to O.K. me and the waiter to sell me liquor. So I rigged myself out for the occasion—tuxedo, large imitation pearl studs, nifty felt hat, and cane—and, in company with two other agents, went to a Broadway show where we picked up three convincing-looking lady friends. Told them we'd take them out for a lively evening. And that was no false promise either as events proved.

Well, when we six, in two taxis, drew up in front of Reisenweber's at Eighth Avenue and 58th Street, we certainly had all the cheer-marks of the real thing just arrived from the theater. I could see the drivers giving the door man the wink, meaning, “More grist for

56

your gin-mill, and remember who brought ‘em to you.”

Shown to a table, we found there were more than a thousand other people present. And most of them appeared to be drinking something other than sarsaparilla. So I asked the waiter how about us.

He hinted that that was what was worrying him. Hadn’t seen us before and, well, he’d have to speak, to the head waiter.

I did the speaking myself by handing the head waiter a card I happened to have with me. It was a card of a rabbi. I said that’s who I was, and that I was just entertaining some friends from out of town.

This explanation was so satisfactory they served us six drinks at four dollars each, making the check twenty-four dollars, which we paid without a murmur except to inform them they were arrested.

And that was the beginning of the end of Reisenweber’s, a place so big and famous nobody thought anything could happen to it.

Another name known to every Broadway night-lifer was Shanley’s. The original had been located in a building on the west side of Times Square, where the Paramount

57

Building now stands, but that was gone and there was a new restaurant of the same name, at 117 West 42nd Street (between Broadway and Sixth Avenue), almost opposite the new Knickerbocker Building—the latter having been remodeled out of the Knickerbocker Hotel where, in wetter days, Maxfield Parrish’s picture, “Old King Cole,” adorned a bar which boasted the most famous free lunch in town, and which was known for miles around as “The Forty-second Street Country Club.”

At any rate the old Shanley’s had gone the way of the Fiddlers Three and the rare roast beef gratis, and this new establishment was supposed to be conforming to the letter of Amendment Eighteen. But we heard different. And I was picked on to verify these rumors.

I did so by dropping in there one evening in December to “make arrangements for entertaining a party of twenty business men from Chicago on New Year’s Eve.” The management was more than anxious to cooperate, and we worked the thing out from caviar to nuts, with such difficult problems as the right kind of paper hats, noise-makers, and toy balloons,

58

and so on, settled to the head waiter's heart's content. Finally, remarking that New Year's Eve was still nearly three weeks off and that I didn't see any reason for going dry all that while, I suggested that a couple of pints in hand would be usable.

They sold them to me. And the party was different and sooner than they expected.

A little further east and two blocks south is the Bryant Park Studios building at Eighty West 40th Street, facing the park. On the ground floor of this building, in which a lot of famous artists had their studios and even Isadora Duncan used to practice her barefoot Beethoven stuff, there flourished a restaurant called the Beaux Arts, so Parisian that it sort of overlooked that it was in Prohibition America. To get in there you pretty nearly had to have one of those French beards, parted in the middle, or the right gestures anyhow. But I took a chance regardless and barged in there one evening about seven o'clock, trying to act as if I had been raised on Murads.

They bowed me to a Parisian pew and I wrestled with the dope sheet that was printed in French, finally deciding on a dish that had

59

a name something like bouillon, which I figured would be clear sailing. But when it came, it was a kind of oversized soup of fish and lobster and what-not, that you go after with knife, fork and spoon, using a piece of bread on the side as a pusher.

The waiter watched genteelly to see how I was making out. I told him it was the best specimen of that dish I had ever seen anywhere. Assured him, with ohs and ahs, that it had anything in Paris lashed to the mast, a regular epicure's knockout. I told him to give my compliments to the chef and say I didn't know how he did it.

The head waiter, hearing me hand out these testimonials, came over to get his share, and I took the opportunity to suggest a bottle of real French whiskey. He pretended at first to be shocked at such an idea, but gradually got less surprised and ended up by selling me a bottle. On the strength of which purchase, I took the liberty of introducing myself in my official capacity. And the head waiter and Monsieur André Bustanoby, the proprietor, were given some bad news in plain English.

Three blocks north of the Beaux Arts, on Sixth Avenue, was a nationally famous restaurant,

known as “Jack’s” for short. If you were so balmy about old times as to let yourself get hooked by one of the old-time hack drivers—the kind that wouldn’t wake up his horse for less than two dollars—the place he would have taken you to for a bite to eat, and maybe a nip, would be Jack’s. In fact, one of these old bozos worked up quite a system in connection with the establishment. After bringing somebody there he would hang around waiting until he saw a suitably mellow sport wobble in the door. An hour or so later Mr. Giddap would get down off his box, whip in hand, and would take a look around inside the restaurant until he spotted his wobbly sucker (the one he found, not the one he brought) who by that time would be still wabblier. Approaching him respectfully, he would inquire, as he polished a battered hat with his sleeve, “Do you still wish me to wait, sir?”

“What?” the drunk would ask, all in a daze.

“The hack, sir,” the old faker would explain, still more respectfully. “I was just wondering if you still wished me to wait?”

And generally the cash settlement would be about five dollars.

Jack’s was that kind of place.

I wouldn’t go so far, though, as to claim it had the connection with the Hippodrome across the street (still going strong in those days) which Al Jolson alleged it had, in one of his Winter Garden songs. In this song he got a big laugh by declaring, in so many words with music, that when the girls marched down into the water of the Hippodrome tank, you mustn’t worry about their apparently drowning to death, because they were actually going under Sixth Avenue and coming up across the way in Jack’s. If the girls had really done so, they would have stumbled on a lot of bottled goods before reaching street level. I’m no mermaid, but I know.

Delegated to find out whether Jack’s wasn’t clinging a little too closely to old traditions, I went there one evening accompanied by a lady. It was in August, 1921, and we were served by an old waiter with the picklish name of Heince who had been on the job for seventeen years. This old fellow told me I looked very familiar to him.

“Well I guess yes!” I assured him, wondering who in the dickens he was mistaking me for.

He still seemed kind of puzzled, then suddenly his face lighted up with, “Oh, now I place you, sir. You’re the gentleman that runs the clothing store down on Canal Street. Remember, I bought an overcoat from you last winter?”

He went over and told Jack Dunstan, the proprietor, that he knew me, and things were so lovely that, along with our food, I bought two bottles of special beer at sixty cents each, and a half pint flask of whiskey for three dollars.

When it came time to leave, friend Heince drew up his bill for the goods, which I covered with a twenty-dollar note. These two pieces of paper he carried to the cashier’s desk. But just as he was starting back with my change, another agent, whom I had planted in the restaurant, took occasion to happen by the cashier’s desk, and copped the check as evidence of sale. On it was marked:

HALF RED 3.00

I mention this detail because Dunstan claimed that he and his restaurant had no part in the transaction; the waiter, he insisted, had merely done business on the hip. And where

63

the stuff came from he couldn’t possibly imagine.

It was such a good theory that when the case came up in court some months later, the jury disagreed and there had to be a second trial. Meanwhile, Dunstan worked on Heince, to get him to shoulder the blame and say it had been just a little deal on his own hook which the management knew nothing about. But Heince objected to being made that kind of a goat. So, as I say, the court affair was gone through all over again—with first-class fireworks. Judge Mack, who presided, made a statement to the effect that there had been some “tall lying.”

Personally, I got tired of waiting for the jury to come to an agreement—if they ever could! So while they were still arguing it out in their padded cell, I thought I might undertake a little late-afternoon visit to the restaurant that had started it all in the first place.

Armed with a search warrant and taking a few assistants along with me, I investigated the premises, finding that the prize number was on top. Along the roof of an extension to the building (at the back), there had been

built a sort of stronghold, a neat secret chamber about 25 by 40 feet, and 15 feet high, in which I found more than \$100,000 worth of the finest quality stuff. A good part of it was pre-Prohibition.

The only access to this high-perched safe deposit was by means of a kind of fire-escape bridge from a window of the private suite of rooms where Dunstan lived—in a separate building fronting on 43rd Street, around the corner. And the window I speak of, opening on this “unofficial connection,” was protected by a heavy steel shutter as though the two buildings weren’t on speaking terms, let alone with any connection. In fact, the whole layout was so “discreet,” I could well understand why nobody had suspected its existence.

As to any similarity to “the secret poker rooms in the old Navarre gambling house in Denver”—a resemblance that one of the newspaper fellows was positive he detected—all I can say is I “read with interest” the next day. At the moment, however, I had the job of getting the \$100,000 worth of stuff safely downstairs and onto trucks without anybody’s way-laying a case or two.

We were toiling quietly (I’m not the sort

of person who sings at his work) when suddenly the Hippodrome matinée let out and practically the entire audience—thousands of people—came crowding over to take in a show they hadn’t paid for. Apparently the fact that they had just seen Powers’ Elephants, the Singer Midgets, and the Annette Kellerman Girls, didn’t lessen their interest in the Performing Agents. Besides which, Times Square and 42nd Street seemed to have their own quotas of watchers to contribute to the occasion. Nor did the newspapers and film concerns located in that neighborhood miss out on what seemed like good material, happening at their doorstep.

Consequently, when the jury came out of seclusion with a verdict to the effect that Mr. Dunstan was *not* implicated in the half-pint deal—well, there was quite an item of news for their edification.

Nevertheless the “vindicated” gentleman’s attorneys immediately held that his acquittal automatically released the government’s claim to the seizure. The court ruled, however, that Dunstan had been on trial

personally, and not the seized liquor. That is to say, his liquor was apparently guilty of what he

66

wasn't. So Judge Mack directed the United States District Attorney to at once file a libel against it.

Four days later, by way of echoing the learned judge's sentiment, I raided the restaurant again. The cellar this time. And I found a vault down there containing sixteen cases of the kind of beer termed "good" by some people.

Evidently these little attentions on my part must have got the place nervous, because when, not long after, a small blaze started in a chimney and some firemen came rushing in to extinguish it, they were held up till they could show they weren't Izzy Einstein and staff in some new disguise. Even so, some of the patrons refused to be convinced; they got up and scooted, rather than take chances.

I take this opportunity to assure any reader who may have been there at the time, that it really wasn't me.

But I make no such claims as to the visits paid by a "vaudeville actor" to places selling liquor just off Broadway in the Fifties. The fact is, as these places were patronized most by theatrical people, I decided to sandwich myself among them as a "ham," with a fellow

67

agent as my team-mate. Together we hung around the upper corners of Times Square where drift-ins from the vaudeville circuits carried on a sort of curb market in brags, telling everybody how "big they'd gone" on the road. When they admitted to us what wows they'd been in Elmira and Chambersburg, we came back at them with Pottsville. And, just on the side, we asked how the Rialto had worried along in our absence, and where you could get a drink nowadays. In this way we learned the ropes. And followed the bunch.

We found there was welcome on the doormat at the Ted Lewis Club, on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 52nd Street—especially after midnight. Here throats which had become dry with speaking lines and singing songs could be de-parched. That is, if you had the price, which we found was almost as stiff as the liquor—five dollars a pint: apparently not too

discouraging for the hundred or so people present. In fact, it wasn't their spirits that seemed dampened.

We, however, felt disappointed at not meeting our distinguished fellow-artist, Mr. Ted Lewis, who, with his famous plug hat (worn either on the left temple or the clarinet), must

68

have been on tour. In his absence we had to be content with arresting the head waiter and the waiter who sold us evidence. And if we neglected to send Mr. Lewis a post card saying, "Wish you were here," the two waiters probably did so.

We likewise paid our respects to a speak where good and bad actors got together, on the third floor of a garage at 223 West 53rd Street "overlooking the Sound," as they say—meaning the Sixth Avenue Elevated (where it travels West). In this Thespian rendezvous we found that the alcoholic "props" were kept in a large safe such as you see in pawnshops—if you know what I mean.

Being curious about it, we came back a second time, bringing a warrant and a professional safe-opener who was attached to our federal unit. He did a pop-goes-the-weasel as our contribution to the evening's entertainment, but so expertly as not to break any of the bottles inside. I can't say, though, that his skill was appreciated by the manager's son who was there in charge until we took him in charge.

While I was counting up, the telephone rang. I answered and found it was somebody

69

asking if any more booze was needed. I said we were practically all cleaned out, and ordered ten cases of Black and White, to be rushed.

Less than an hour later the man who had telephoned arrived, having come all the way from Harlem. And he almost fell over when he saw who he had delivered the stuff to, for he was a man named Jaffee who had met me a year before, when I had arrested him on West Street. And the ten-case lot of Scotch certainly did a lot to make his welcome a warm one. In fact, taking one thing with another (and his truck came in very handy for that purpose) I had new proof that the hard-boiled guys of Sucker Street are suckers themselves if you give them a chance to be. And here was another instance. My fellow-actor and I were promenading in the vicinity of the

Square one evening when I noticed a place that had too many blinds drawn for good ventilation.

“Wait a minute,” I said. “I’ll be right back.”

Stepping inside I found what looked remarkably like a bar, with a fellow in a white coat on the job there. Asked him for a shot

70

of his best nerve tonic to brace me up with.

He looked me over and decided I was O.K. But he was nervous for some reason.

“Just a minute,” he whispered, peeking through a crack in the curtain. “There’s one of them damned agents hanging around outside. I can spot ’em every time. When he moves on I’ll be with you.”

Ten minutes later he was with both of us.

71

CHAPTER VI

The Limelight of Secrecy

A HIGH official in Washington had me on the carpet for getting so much publicity.

“You get your name in the newspapers all the time, and in the headlines too,” he said severely, “whereas mine hardly ever gets mentioned. I must ask you to remember that you are merely a subordinate—not the whole show.”

I told him it wasn’t my fault if my work took me away from desks and offices to where there was something doing, something that made news. I was sorry he didn’t get the hand from the papers that his high position entitled him to, and I didn’t mean to be insubordinate. But when you raid a place and load barrels and cases of liquor on trucks, and when thousands of people come swarming to watch the excitement—well, you can’t help it if there’s a certain amount of interest taken. Nor can you prevent reporters from joining



The art of cutting, bottling and labeling—as practiced in South Brooklyn, near the Raymond Street Jail.



Some “real German Kümmel” of the kind sold as “just off the boat.”

the crowd and writing pieces about what they saw.

But my explanation failed to soothe him. He stayed sore and issued an announcement that he would suspend any agent whose name appeared in the newspapers in connection with a raid. As a result, my work was anonymous for nine weeks. Then it sort of leaked out that I had something to do with a saloon-pinching party that took in places all over Manhattan at one swoop. I didn't get suspended. And thereafter newspapers reported news as per usual.

It was kind of strange, though, that a secret agent should be almost constantly in the public prints and yet continue his work successfully as a secret agent. Well, I didn't arrange it that way; I just sleuthed and pinched. If the results I got and the ways I got them inspired the newspaper men to call me “incomparable Izzy,” “honest Izzy, America's premier hooch-

hound,” etc., I didn’t steer their pens; I just steered law-violators to the lockup and trucks of booze to the Knickerbocker Warehouse. I raided and writers wrote.

For example:

73

The New York *Times* saying, “Izzy Einstein ... holds the record in the United States for the largest number of liquor arrests.”

The New York *Tribune* referring to me as the “master mind of the Federal rum-ferrets.”

The *Sun Herald* remarking that agent Einstein, “affectionately known by friend and enemy as ‘Izzy’ ” was “peculiarly gifted in the art of having his personality and business appear other than they are.”

The Brooklyn *Eagle* telling its readers:

“Izzy does not sleep. He’s on the job night and day, and accomplishes more for the drys than half a dozen anti-saloon leagues.

“It’s getting so now that a saloon-keeper hesitates in serving the wants of his oldest and best-known customer, for fear that he may suddenly develop into Izzy.

“A few more Izzies scattered over the country and the U. S. would be bone dry, parched, and withered.”

Actual news stories of exploits I was connected with—and they were generally headlined with my name—ran up into the hundreds of columns from all over the country. A friend of mine who runs a clipping bureau saved up a pile of scrapbooks of them that

74

you could load a wheelbarrow with, and made me a handsome present of the lot. Dipping into these, as I sometimes do for old times’ sake, I seem to find evidence that Izzy the agent was sort of in the news.

This idea was backed up by no less a person than Mr. O. O. McIntyre, who in his syndicated “New York Day by Day” declared that, “Einstein has become as famous in New York as the Woolworth Building. No morning paper is complete without some account of his exploits.”

I admit there was something in what he said. But I couldn’t quite endorse a rumor put out by the *Troy Record* to the effect that I was planning to disguise myself as a whale to catch wet ocean liners.

Really, I'm afraid some of the newspaper fellows exaggerated a little, and even took liberties with the seriousness of my work. For example, I investigated and raided an Inn up in Sullivan County, where there happened to be a masquerade party on at the time I sprung my surprise, and it just happened I had been asked to serve as one of the judges of the evening. Such were the facts. And

75

this is how it was written up in the New York *Sun*:

IZZY ACTS AS A BEAUTY JUDGE QUITS JOB BEFORE MAKING AWARD TO ARREST HOST AT ROADHOUSE PARTY

A good time was being had by all at the Nut Shell Inn, Lake Huntington, near Monticello, Sullivan County, New York State, Saturday evening. Dancing and games were the order of the evening, and merry quips and jests were being flung about, together with nods and becks and wreathed smiles.

Among the merrymakers was one whose nods and jests, as well as his quips and pranks, were second to none. Such a distinguished looking feller he was! He had it a Pallum Beach suit on.

"And the choke of it is," he said, laughing, "I ain't been within a thousand miles of Pallum Beach. On'y Rockaway I been to."

So saying, he turned and gave a low-necked lady a jovial slap on the lower neck.

This was on the terrace, in the moonlight. The lady picked up an iron vase from the lawn, sighed and crowned the merry cuss with it.

"How like a cave man you are!" she murmured. But he did not answer.

Then the strains of the orchestra were wafted from the ballroom. It was playing the allegro movement from Irving Berlin's sonata in two flats. This brought the gentleman to.

"Come," she said, "let us enter. They are choosing the queen of the ball."

76

The gentleman entered. He had a large bump on his dome where the iron vase had landed. A strange man rushed up.

“Ah,” he said joyfully, “you have a bump. I take it, then, that you are a baseball umpire. Then I name you as our Paris. You shall name the most beautiful girl here to-night. You shall be Paris.”

“I couldn’t be it,” said the gentleman.

“Oh, tut!” responded the other warmly: “I repeat, tut.”

“You can tut all you vant, but you can see for yourself that I ain’t no Greek. I ain’t got the profile. Anyvay, how could I be it a Paris, when I vare a Pallum Beach suit instead of a fig leaf?”

The man pondered a moment.

“We-ell,” he said, “we have no fig trees here, ’tis true, and pity ’tis ’tis true, but we have some wonderful elms. Won’t you—”

“Oh, I’ll be it,” the gentleman cut him off; “bring on the vomen.”

Ten minutes later they asked Paris to whom he had awarded the apple. A dangerous glint came into his eye. He spoke.

“I choose the proprietor of this place,” he said, “and also Mr. Sam Legman and Mr. Ben Legman, who I vill tell Commissioner Hitchcock sold me some hooch this very evening in this very place. My name is not Paris: it’s Izzy Einstein.”

Thus it was that Adolph Weiss, the proprietor of the Nut Shell Inn, and his waiters, Sam and Benny, met Izzy Einstein.

Nobody got the apple. Three guesses as to who got the raspberry.

77

I guess you might say this was pretty funny, but I can assure you there was no laughing done by the three men I arrested. They and the Inn were just plain pinched. Personally, I didn’t mind being served up to the readers as comedy, any more than I minded an occasional grouchy squawk, here and there, such as one that came out in an Albany paper. This Mr. Razzberry complained that I was getting too much publicity and that I didn’t even look like a secret service man. Which, you might say, was a hot one.

Yes, I grant that I wasn’t the type and that my methods were “all wrong.” But it just happened that this all-wrongness of mine accomplished three results:

(1) I scored more arrests than anybody else did and confiscated more liquor too.

(2) I had less trouble in making these arrests, because the minute a law-violator knew who I was, he knew I meant business and that his goose was cooked. Nineteen out of twenty of them surrendered as mild as lambs.

(3) By becoming a character in the public mind, I popularized prohibition. People saw that here was an agent who was willing to take risks and be joshed, and who made the

78

grim business of catching law-violators a human affair. They felt I was a good scout, and they were on my side—that is to say, on the *laws* side, instead of feeling too sorry for the law breakers I nabbed. My career demonstrated that enforcement could be done effectively, honestly, and fairly.

An odd proof of my standing was the habit that out of town newspapers got into of speaking of smart agents in their territory as being regular Izzy Einsteins. There was the Izzy Einstein of northern New Jersey, and the Izzy Einstein of Minneapolis. And so on. They seemed to crop up everywhere. It was even claimed that over in England the new Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard was a “real Izzy Einstein.”

But if I'd been awarding a loving cup to the best imitator, I believe I'd have given it to the Pittsburgh Einstein, an agent by the name of Kemmerling. This fellow was assigned to catch a fake agent who was trying to extort money out of a hotel proprietor. The payment was to be made at an undertaking establishment. This gave our friend an idea. He went there a little while ahead of time and got the undertaker to lay him out

79

as a corpse, with candles around him and all the fixings, and, as that kind of silent witness, he was present when the hotel proprietor paid over the money to the crook.

Down in Dalton, Georgia, there was another funny one—“Izzy Einstein, Junior.” This was a dog, a moonshiner's bloodhound. A sheriff down there got hold of this dog in some way and found him so keen at smelling out mountaineers' stills, he gave him that name and the newspapers had a lot of fun over it. I read about it myself as a matter of curiosity, never dreaming I'd ever lay eyes on my namesake. Then suddenly one day a crate arrived at

my home. It was the dog, all the way from Georgia. He was an interesting-looking hound all right, gray, short-haired with long, floppy ears and quite a nose on him. You could see he was a good sniffer.

I asked a fellow from down there what you gave bloodhounds to eat. He said fried chicken was what they were used to, but I decided that would be too much upkeep. Anyhow "Junior" seemed contented in his new home and I took him out raiding with me in Yonkers, where he and I visited 21

80

places, made 16 arrests and seized \$20,000 worth of liquor. When I brought him home that night, I felt he was a swell dog all right and that we'd have lots of good parties of the same kind. But somebody stole him. And that, I'm sorry to say, was the end of Izzy, Junior.

Besides imitators, I also had impersonators. One day when I was in court there was brought in a fellow named Wasserman who had been going around pretending he was me and shaking down saloons for \$25 a week protection money. Anybody who had paid him certainly must have been easy, because this fellow didn't look the least like me. It just showed what some people can get away with till they're caught. But Wasserman was just a piker compared to a fellow named Schwartz, who posed as me over in Pennsylvania. *That* guy cleaned up to such an extent that when they nabbed him he had a limousine and a chauffeur. He'd fooled even the biggest bootleggers.

There were other fellows who, not quite daring to say they were Izzy Einstein, just pretended to be cousins of mine. I had trouble with them too. One of these "cousins"

81

named Cohen ran a chop suey place down on Pike Street and on the strength of his alleged family ties was selling hard liquor. I settled the matter of our kinship by locking him up.

Aside from all these odd numbers, there were cases, happening all the time, where people were mistaken for me. Up in Watertown, New York, a film salesman was "recognized" as the dreaded Izzy Einstein and the town dried up as fast as the rumor could get around. It tickled him and he played up to the situation in great style.

A still crazier scare hit three towns located near together out on Long Island. Each town reported that I'd been positively seen in one of the other

two. All three of them were in a panic, with saloonkeepers frantically hiding their liquor. And that day I was working in the Bronx! But the funniest of all was a man who ran a clothing store down in Memphis, Tenn., where I had pulled off a big dragnet raid. This fellow got spotted as Izzy Einstein and waiters were so nervous about waiting on him they spilled the soup; and in clubs and barber shops there was a bad case of jumpiness the minute he stepped in. The poor man got nervous himself about

82

upsetting so many people and tried to assure everybody that he wasn't me. But they thought that was just part of Izzy's little game. There was no telling how it might have ended if the newspapers down there hadn't published a full explanation and calmed the town.

Fame certainly is a funny thing!

One day in the corridor of the Federal Building I met Doug Fairbanks and Mary Pickford who'd come there in connection with some lawsuit. The minute he heard who I was, he held up his hands and said, "You can frisk me, I'm innocent this time."

I told them I didn't know that people out in Hollywood knew of my existence.

"They certainly do," she assured me. "Why, when mothers tuck their little ones in their cradles they say: 'Now you be good and go right to sleep or Izzy Einstein will get you.'"

The appreciation that was most helpful to me was that of the dry leaders of America, especially Mr. Wayne B. Wheeler of The Anti-Saloon League. He wrote me many letters of praise and encouragement, such as the following:

83

Mr. Issi [sic] Einstein,
117 Ridge St.,
New York City.

DEAR MR. EINSTEIN:

Congratulations on the good work you are doing. The bootlegger who gets away from you has to get up early in the morning.

With best wishes for your continued success, I am

Yours cordially,

WBW-LL

(signed)

W. B. WHEELER.

At the time of the Democratic National Convention of 1924 (the one where the Smith crowd fought the McAdoo bunch for so many days) I was invited to meet Mr. Wheeler at his headquarters in the Herald Square Hotel, and we had quite a little conference. The newspapers got the idea we were planning to raid the Convention Hall, but that wasn't so. What Mr. Wheeler did request was that Madison Square Garden and surroundings should be closely watched for wetness. I promised him I'd do the best I could. Accordingly, I hung around the Waldorf, gotten up as a Southern colonel with a goatee; dashed up to Yonkers where I succeeded in nabbing a lot of liquor that was coming in for the occasion; and attended all the sessions at the Garden wearing a delegate's

84

badge. When it was all over we could report that no bootlegging had been done openly, although there were such things as liquor concealed in canes, hip pockets, and so on. And after each session, we found about a truck load of bottles. But they weren't legal evidence because they were all empty.

One of the speakeasies that was being extra careful at the time wouldn't let anybody in unless he gave his name. I tapped on the door and when they asked me who I was I said, "Izzy Einstein."

They let me in, thinking it was a swell joke. And I got them.

85

CHAPTER VII

Tips, Squeals, and Squawks

A LAW-ABIDING resident of the West Fifties, aroused at the way a near-by saloon was running wide open, sent an urgent telegram to Washington. To make sure of getting action he addressed it:

HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT WOODROW
WILSON AND MRS. WILSON
THE WHITE HOUSE

With all the patriotism that he could put into fifty words (it was a night letter), he besought them, as Chief Executive and First Lady of the Land, to prove their moral leadership by seeing to it that this joint was closed up.

Possibly the addressees happened to be busy that day—League of Nations or something. All I know is, the telegram was referred to the New York office and I was elected. And

86

within four hours the saloon was a closed incident.

It was the hottest tip I ever handled. “Different,” you might say.

Usually I got my tips from discontented drinkers—people sore at having paid good money for bad stuff—and from bootleggers with a grudge against their rivals. In fact, I found that in the business of rum-rustling, the old maxims didn’t apply. It was the *dis*-satisfied customer that was the best advertisement to me of what was going on, And competition was the *death* of trade, if you knew how to use it that way.

For instance, one day when I was escorting a bootlegger to the West 47th Street police station, he said to me, as we were walking along:

“I’m not a rich man—especially after what’s just happened to me—but I’d be glad to give you the price of a very nice hat if you’d tell me who tipped you off about my business.”

The business he was referring to, and which he had been put out of, was a sort of garage and warehouse combination that I’d been watching for some time, ever since I first

87

noticed a suspicious looking load going in there.

“Well,” I said, “I’m not allowed to tell secrets. But did it ever occur to you that one of your nearby competitors might not wish you any too great success?”

“By Glory, I suspected it!” he burst out, stopping in his tracks and grabbing my arm. “You mean that blankety, blank fellow at—” And in the midst of his cussing he mentioned the name and address.

“Sorry,” I said, “wish I could tell you, but it might cost me my job.”

I now take this opportunity to thank the man for the information on which his rival, running a place we had no idea of, was located and arrested. And I seem to remember that it was Mr. Barnum who said something to the effect that people liked to be fooled, and that the slicker they are the harder they fall.

I myself got outplayed in my designs on a saloon run by a fellow named Robinson at 1480 Fifth Avenue. This fellow was selling liquor all right and I’d been watching him. But I staged my little stunt one day too late; for when I breezed in on him and asked for



A little discovery in a select residential section of Mount Vernon, N. Y.
Three large stills were running full blast.



To find moonshine outfits I didn't have to go to the mountains.

whiskey, he said he hadn't a drop. And it was a fact.

"Three revenue men were in here yesterday," he explained, "and they cleaned me out. They had a search warrant and went through everything on the place."

This was certainly news to me, as I was positive nobody on our force had been in there.

Puzzled, I asked him to let me see the warrant, as I was always interested in that sort of thing. He handed it to me. It was prettier than any I had ever seen: a single sheet of heavy bond paper, in the lower right hand corner of which was a heavy seal, attractively done in gold and purporting to be the seal of the "Internal Revenue Bureau."

The wording on it, dealing with "search and seizure," was printed in imposing type, with blank spaces for the names and description of premises, etc. The only thing wrong about it was that it bore absolutely no

resemblance to a genuine warrant. Such documents—and I’ve wielded thousands of them—are in plain humdrum typewritten form and cover several pages. This gem was worth framing. And I admit it was a sweet

89

means of getting liquor right out from under the nose of the law.

The fact that it was printed and gotten up in such style made me think I might run across other copies in other places. But I never did. Nor did I ever get any light on who the Three Warranteers were.

But I copped an almost equally original chiseler named Bob Harris. This fellow was wandering the streets of Brooklyn practically “on his uppers” when he found a little notebook somebody had dropped. It contained names and addresses that seemed to mean nothing in particular until he happened to pass one of these places, located at 109 Fulton Street, and noticed the smell of hooch coming out. Which aroma caused him to see a great light. “Aha!” he thought. “I’ve got hold of some Prohibition agent’s suspicion list.”

He went into this place. Told the proprietor, an Italian fellow by the name of Carena, that for twenty dollars he could give him some information of great importance. Carena was interested but not at that price.

They compromised on ten dollars; then Harris informed him:

90

“You’re on a raid list. Gonna drop down on you very soon. So watch your step.”

“What do you mean ‘very soon,’? Tell me what day it’s gonna be so I can fool ‘em.”

Harris, bluffing, said it would be in about a week.

He worked the same game on nearly a dozen of the places that were listed, collecting more money than he had probably ever had before. Then he got scared. The predicted raids weren’t happening, and the saloonkeepers who had paid him for his valuable information, were getting ready to nail him. So, to save his reputation as a tipoff artist, he looked my name up in the telephone book and called me at my residence, suggesting that these saloons would be nice places to raid. In fact, he explained the delicate situation he was in.

I did what I could for poetic justice by pinching the saloons and arresting him on the charge of extortion. He was really *too* clever.

From a more reliable source, we got a tip about some potatoes that were coming in from Canada as camouflage for something else. A carload of them had got past the border and

91

was headed for the peculiar-produce market in New York. I was delegated as spud inspector.

In the Mott Haven Yards, up in the Bronx, I inspected car after car of produce, and never found a potato without the law. Finally, when I had handled what seemed like a million spuds, I found what I was after. It was a box car loaded with 500 bushels of potatoes, and, what was not on the bill of lading, 600 sacks each containing a case of Scotch. Except for that, the car was O.K.

A report that there was a quantity of hooch hidden away in Chinatown brought me from Mott Haven to Mott Street, and as the Chinese are a sober race the report seemed rather hard to believe. Also, the Chinese have an etiquette to their drinking which does not fit in with hasty, slyly downed gulps of booze.

The report had come out of an investigation into the disappearance of some girl whose name I forget now, although the case was headlined for days back in the late winter of 1921. We had received letters claiming that in some hidden, underground dive where this girl was held captive, or killed, or maybe not, there was a regular distillery.

92

It sounded like a bum steer, but I was assigned.

I hung around that thickly settled, secretive section of town, ate in various chop suey parlors, listened to this conversation and that, and didn't hear a thing. I don't speak much Chinese, even the Chinatown variety.

Gradually, though, I got a hunch about a place called the Windsor Arcade, running through from 20 Mott Street to 16 Doyer Street. At first I attempted to get in there through a Chinese barber shop near the Mott Street entrance, but encountered a trick wall which stumped me. So I switched around to the Doyer Street side. Here, underneath a table in a novelty store where I dropped in to buy some gingseng root, I discovered a trap-door that looked phoney. Descending down through it, I found myself in a narrow alley which led to a second trap-door, and this in turn led me, with some more acrobatics, down into a sub-cellar that was like a tunnel. I

was certainly getting in on this Chinese proposition on the ground floor. What I got in on was 800 bottles of whiskey and gin, and some barrels of California wine and sherry, but no tea.

93

This stuff belonged to a white man who was an outsider in Chinatown. The Chinese were so glad to see him pinched and his liquor piled on a truck, that about three hundred of them gathered around me and my helpers, cheering us and giving us a grand send-off as we rolled away.

I got into still deeper stuff when I tackled International Diplomacy, which was wished on me by a bootlegger who felt sore. He'd had a little disagreement over price with a young gentleman from Peru, who claimed to be connected with the Peruvian Legation; and instead of telling this gentleman to go to hell, as a rude bootlegger would have done, he spilled the situation to us, tipping us off to the fact that in a place called the Village Garage, at 358 West 26th Street, there were some alleged "household belongings" that might interest us.

I went to the garage and found that the goods consisted of two enormous boxes each containing forty-two cases of Haig & Haig. As these tid-bits had been labeled "furniture," and as the young gentleman who brought them to America hadn't been really connected with his government's legation at the time he

94

arrived, we felt anxious to know more about them, especially since he had attempted to make a deal with the bootlegger.

He was invited to drop in for a chat at the office of Mr. Appleby, chief of enforcement in the New York Zone. His wife also came along, and I was there too. Not to mention a stenographer taking down the questions and answers. It was the nearest I ever came to being a real diplomat, that inquiry into the liquor of the young man from Peru.

The gentleman from Peru, whose name was Señor Marino Loas, seemed hurt that we should have any doubts as to how official he was. He explained, with dignity, that he was twenty-three years old and a personal friend of the President of Peru, and that he had been Chancellor of the Peruvian Legation in Brussels. Said that in that post he had done the work of his ninety-year-old uncle, who was Counsellor but too old to counsel.

On a visit to London, a friend had told Señor Loas that he was going to be assigned to the United States, probably as a commercial attaché in Boston. This was such interesting news that he invested in eighty-four cases of Haig & Haig, at the attractive price

95

of five shillings a bottle, and had them boxed as “furniture” because he didn’t wish the people on the ship to know.

With these as part of his household belongings, he arrived in New York in June on his way home to Peru. As it was a stop-off of only six weeks, he put the furniture, with the exception of the wet goods, in a storage warehouse in Boston, and hadn’t really had time to visit the Legation in Washington. But he had acquired, a month after arrival, the title of Commercial Attaché, with no responsibilities.

His wife explained that this hooch was just a little nest egg for the cellar of a house they were thinking of building.

We asked him again. Was he actually an attaché when he came in with the stuff?

He said that he had the best of verbal assurance when he was in London, that he was going to be one. So maybe the eighty-four cases were an expression of confidence on his part.

Unfortunately, our department couldn’t quite *share* that confidence. So:

(1) I was sent on to Washington to find

96

out the exact status of Senor Loas in the Peruvian Legation.

(2) Upon my return, Chief Appleby made a report to Commissioner Haynes in Washington.

(3) Commissioner Haynes presented the matter to the State Department for a decision.

All this while the liquor in the garage was under guard of federal Prohibition agents day and night. Then finally the momentous word arrived from Washington, which was that we were to give the gentleman his liquor, no matter what his status was. It seemed that he was entitled to get by as honorary, whether appointed at the time, or not, and the Haig & Haig was furniture as any diplomat would recognize instantly, which showed me I was no diplomat.

Well, it’s a queer world we worry along in!

A mysterious telephone call that came in one day brought the news that 5,000 cases of booze were being landed at Islip, Long Island, and that they were due to be brought into Manhattan in a fleet of fifty trucks. The informant seemed to know all the details. Said these trucks would pass over the Queensboro Bridge, between midnight and 2 A.M.,

97

and he even reeled off the license numbers of all fifty trucks.

It was the most complete tip in all my experience. So naturally our unit was galvanized into action, as the newspaper fellows say. Fifty of the best agents were detailed to the bridge, myself among them, and we watched, almost pop-eyed with vigilance.

Well, along after midnight, here came the trucks. About thirty of them. And the numbers matched up with what we were looking for. But—and here was the little surprise—

Every one of these trucks was empty!

Next day we found out that the *real* trucks, all fifty of them, had come over the Williamsburg Bridge, while all of us agents were carefully, and uselessly, watching the Queensboro Bridge, miles away up the river.

98

CHAPTER VIII

Sinful Suds

TO MAKE near beer, such as the law permits, it is necessary to brew the “real stuff” and then tame to legal mildness by de-alcoholizing to less than one-half percent. The government recognized this as the “only way”—and tried to guard against such accidents as the full alcohol strength being left in, or being separated only to be united again by smart needlework.

If you think your Uncle Sam occasionally got out-smarted, you are probably right. But I can assure you that the law-breaking section of the public got fooled *constantly*; countless thousands of people paid from twenty cents to a dollar a bottle for stuff sold as real beer, and which they drank believing it to be real beer, when actually it was just near beer.

Even saloonkeepers. I’m thinking of one, particularly, who was located on the West Side. This fellow never got wise to the game that was being played on him until a couple

99

of us agents came along in our quiet way and looked into his place of business. We were engaged in collecting certain whiskey and gin supplies from behind his bar—not a very large quantity—when I suggested that the cellar might be worth a little sightseeing trip. Immediately he got in a panic and acted almost like a baby, so I knew that his real investment was below street level. And sure enough, when we went down there, in spite of every kind of effort on his part to stop us, we found barrels, barrels, barrels! They had come from Pennsylvania, which was the source of a great deal of illegal beer that reached New York in those days. (And still is, I am told.) But when we broke open one of these barrels and tested the stuff, we found it contained only the permissible half percent alcohol. Consequently, the fancy price he had paid for it was a velvet lining for somebody’s pocket. The discovery made him mad enough to burst; so arresting him for the few trifles upstairs, seemed almost like an act of kindness to take his mind off his real grievance.

But at Hunter’s Point, just across the East River from the Tudor City end of 42nd

100

Street, I found beer that was very, very real. The place was a hotel called Dunnstater's, which was much frequented by politicians and hence supposedly safe from being troubled on account of what was going on there. I visited it, just the same, and was interested to note 14 barrels—really too much to cart into Manhattan, so I super-powered each barrel with formaldehyde, a flavor that, chemists tell me, has a tendency to put a crimp in the suds.

The question of where real beer was coming from—for Dunnstater's was just one of hundreds getting it—gave the authorities much thought and caused us agents plenty of scouting work. Occasionally we saw a clue rolling by on four wheels. One of these trucks that aroused my suspicions was labeled "Fruits & Vegetables," but it was a closed affair and nary a fruit or vegetable was visible to the naked eye. I trailed this mystery vehicle and found that it seemed to be on friendly terms with the Ringler Brewery at 203 East 92nd Street, one of the largest old-time brewing establishments in New York City. To discover what was going on, I and another agent disguised ourselves as night

101

watchmen and spent a few nights across the street smoking corncob pipes and doing some professional watching. At last we were rewarded by seeing our "food" truck come out of there apparently with a fresh load. We nailed it and found 91 half-barrels aboard. This seemed plenty of evidence to the government, so we made a raid, seizing 320 barrels of real beer.

Later we padlocked the place, which had a capital investment of \$750,000. You'd think that a concern with that much money at stake wouldn't have taken such risks. Indeed, not many of the big, old-line breweries in the city cared to.

It was mostly from the outskirts and further-away regions that the stuff came flowing in. A truck might get caught now and then, without the establishment in Jersey, or Pennsylvania, or upstate being found out. But in Yonkers, the town that takes hold of Broadway where the metropolis lets it go, there was a concern called the Yonkers Brewing Company, located on Chicken Island (don't blame me, I didn't name it), which was rumored to be doing things that the government would

102

consider "interesting if true." And I was assigned.

Disguising myself in unstylish clothes, as the sort of man who hangs around breweries, I went up there and hung around for a couple of weeks. Found that this establishment was running full blast, day and night, with 126 employees. From some of them, with whom I got acquainted, I gathered a very definite notion that the beer being made there lost nothing of its power before leaving for the outer world, such as New York City. In fact, the many fascinating items that I gleaned about the beer industry as practiced on Chicken Island resulted in a conference of Mr. Palmer Canfield, legal advisor to Federal Director Day, and other gentlemen. I had quite a final report to make to them, on the strength of which, they told me to seize the plant.

Accordingly, I went there at 4:30 one morning, taking with me a government chemist and my Georgia bloodhound, Izzy, Junior, of which I have told you in a previous chapter. I made this a formal, official visit by handing in my card at the door. They admitted us. I found it to be quite an atmospheric

103

old place, its quaintness dating from 1889, but the fluid cooking in the vats looked very up-to-the-minute. Our chemist, who tested it, confirmed that impression. To my dog's professional nose, the aroma from the hundreds of barrels in the big store room was too "good" to be legal. This stuff was labeled Aprilla, a name that had a "soft" sound, but the stuff itself tested out at six percent. The brewmaster, who arrived on the scene as we were making these researches, seemed irked at our curiosity. He intimated that, having been with the company twenty-four years, he knew all about it that needed to be known; and remonstrated that we shouldn't be so prejudiced as to imagine that a few hundred barrels of six percent stuff on the premises had anything to do with a place called New York.

Somehow, though, I couldn't help imagining that it *did*. So I assembled a nice lot of evidence, and, with the approval of United States District Attorney Hayward and a warrant from Commissioner Hitchcock, I dismissed the employees, and closed the place up with government seals.

Think of my surprise, then, at finding when I returned later, to remove the stuff, that the

104

evidence had been replaced by near beer! Somebody—or maybe it was the cat—must have got in, despite Uncle Sam’s seals. Frankly I didn’t like it and I arrested the president and the brewmaster.

At the court proceedings, which resulted from this little affair, the Brewery was represented by the ex-mayor of Yonkers, who scored a legal triumph on the ground that it had not been proved that the six percent Aprilla ever got outside of the establishment. So probably those hundreds and hundreds of barrels I saw there, were just being saved for a rainy day or some other wet contingency. But if the expression “Oh, yeah?” had been in existence at that time, I can think of those who might have used it.

Up at Auburn, New York, the Cold Spring Brewery didn’t wait for me to call. The minute they got word that I had intercepted one of their trucks, as it was rolling merrily to Buffalo, they started emptying vats and destroying kegs. By the time I got to this establishment, about fifty barrels’ worth had already gone into the sewer. But I found enough to answer the government’s purpose. And the Cold Spring Brewery ran dry.

105

This business of truck trailing had its hazards. One night in Brooklyn, the “City of Churches and Baby Carriages,” I spotted a truck with six unlabeled beer barrels that, from a distance, didn’t look so “near” to me. Hopped into a taxi and followed it. The truckman was some speedster. By the time we were able to draw alongside, the taxi’s radiator was foaming like a scuttle of suds itself. But I managed to leap aboard the moving truck.

“Bandits!” one of the three fellows on the truck hollered out. His companions seemed to think it was a good idea, and took up the cry.

A couple of cops came rushing. One of them raised his club for a crack on my coco, when the other cop, fortunately, happened to recognize me and called my name.

The ride to Prohibition Headquarters was more quiet.

Yet it didn’t quite come up to the pomp and dignity of a specimen of beer-transportation proceedings which I once disrespectfully broke in on. I happened to be in a saloon at 230 West 4th Street, checking up the results of raiding the place, when I happened to look

106

out of the window and got a shock. A black hearse was just drawing up at the door. I wondered if this was a gentle hint of what some bootlegger had

in mind for me. But suddenly my attack of the creeps was relieved by seeing two supposed undertaker's men open the doors of the hearse and roll out ten half-barrels.

It wasn't *my* funeral after all.

CHAPTER IX

A Shirtful of Whiskey in Rhode Island

ONLY half-pint size and with a coastline that was ideal for rum runners, Rhode Island never took to Prohibition. When the Eighteenth Amendment came up for ratification, this littlest state in the Union turned it down with a bang and a Bronx cheer; and ever since then Rhode Island has been giving the authorities in Washington more worry than Texas and California combined. To bring about any sort of enforcement there was a pip of a problem.

Finally, in September of 1922, it was decided that something drastic would have to be done. I received orders, along with about twenty-five other agents, to proceed to Providence. We were to cooperate with the local forces; and that would have been easy, because the local forces weren't doing anything. In fact, the majority of the local personnel was in the act of getting fired right down to

108

stenographers and charwomen. So that rather left it up to us. And, as I found out, we were being kept tabs on by some special agents from the Intelligence Department in Washington, sent on for the purpose.

Well, we checked in at various hotels in town under the best names we could think of. I put up at the Biltmore. And then we got busy as quietly as possible. We decided that if people in this city and state didn't know what Prohibition meant, we wouldn't give them any hints of it till we had had a chance to gather some evidence. Furthermore, we had been specially cautioned by Washington that in this town bootleggers had an uncanny way of learning about intended raids a couple of days before they happened; for it was not only a wet town but also a very "leaky" one.

So we started in, watching our step at every turn, and the first day everything went serenely. Apparently nobody knew we'd come. But the second day, as we were sauntering around, dropping in here and there for a look, I noticed that things were tightening up a bit. Just something in the air. You could feel it. And so I wasn't entirely surprised when a man came up to me at the hotel and

109

said he'd like to invite me to a little party that evening—a dinner at a social club he belonged to. He introduced a couple of his friends to me and they all said they hoped I'd come. I didn't know just what the idea was, but I knew it was something. So I told them I couldn't give a definite answer at the moment, but would let them know later if I'd be able to accept their invitation.

Good thing I stalled! Hardly an hour afterward, I was tipped off by one of the Intelligence men, who was a personal friend of mine. He told me about the merry little party that had been framed for me. It was to be “quite a surprise”—in the form of much liquor and jazzy dames—and I was to be caught by reporters and flash-light camera men in a way that would fry my goose as a Government agent. How my friend found out I don't know. That was his business, and he was good at it. But on the strength of what he told me I informed my intended hosts that I wasn't feeling well.

Next day, before things got any more tanglefoot for us, I slipped out and, in company with some other agents, went scouting around town in some of the outlying districts—Pawtucket,

110

Woonsocket and so on. It's a great region for textile mills, and mill hands aren't generally millionaires, so we wore old clothes in making our calls at the saloons. And we varied things a bit by being longshoremen part of the time, and then hod-carriers, also coalbearers, fruit peddlers and just plain street corner bums.

A couple of us began the day's work by ordering an early breakfast at a spaghetti establishment I had my suspicions of. We arrived so early that the proprietor hadn't come yet, but the bartender-waiter, who was just opening up, offered us a table and then went back into the kitchen to prepare the food. I chose this opportunity to take a look behind the bar. He heard me, came rushing out and grabbed a revolver from somewhere, telling me to stay perfectly still or he'd plug me. I showed my badge and that changed his mind.

Later, with hods and shovels, we stopped in for rest and refreshment at a saloon run by a man named Woodwick who sold us stuff that was first-cousin to Wood Alcohol. When we flashed our badges and handed him a summons he keeled over, just as though he'd

111

drunk some of his own liquor. We left him in the care of his bartender who had a nice name too: Bourbonnaris. On the summons it looked like a new name for Kentucky High-ball.

Most of these places—we “left cards” at about thirty—were wide open. But there was one that had a foxy system: the bartender wearing an overcoat with a different kind of bottle in every pocket. In case of a raid he could walk out with the supply and hide or destroy it, and there’d be nothing found. We managed, however, to nab this stuff while still “on the hoof.”

At another saloon one of my companions bummed a drink in exchange for a tip, though at first the bartender was skeptical.

“Tell me your tip,” he said, “and we’ll see if it’s worth a drink.”

The tip was that there were Federal agents on the job in the neighborhood. He got the drink. And a few minutes later the recipient of this valuable information was handed a little “tip” with our compliments.

But there was one fellow we were particularly after, and that was a man named Taylor, proprietor of a place in Central Falls, just

112

outside of Providence, in regard to whom the Department had received numerous complaints. This fellow was reputed to have boasted that “no Federal gumshoer could get him.” So we had his name, you might say, at the top of our visiting list.

Well, I took a ride in a car past his place to see what it looked like, and I noticed that the street in front was torn up with a new sewer being put in, and that men with picks and shovels were at work in little groups all up and down the block. That gave me an idea. Went back into town and returned with a couple of other agents, the three of us armed with shovels and with old bandannas around our necks, Italian style. We set to work dishing the dirt along with the other shovelers, and the sewer contractor, whoever he was, never guessed that he got about a dollar’s worth of shoveling he didn’t pay for. Then we took time off to slake our whistles at the establishment of Mr. Taylor.

He welcomed us and our shovels cordially enough, responding to our requests for whiskey by pouring some “amber fluid” (as they say in court) out of a large earthenware pitcher. But when I jumped behind the bar

113

to grab the evidence, he saw me out of the corner of his eye, made a quick turn, and dumped the entire contents of the pitcher in my face.' It stung my eyes, almost blinding me for the moment, and my whole shirt was drenched with the stuff.

Maybe I murmured something. (He claimed afterward that I used impolite language on the premises.) I'm not much of a cusser; but then, on the other hand, I'm not used to having stuff like that flung in my eyes and down my bosom—so perhaps an exclamation escaped me. Anyhow he certainly escaped me, dashing out of the place like mad and hoofing it a couple of blocks. Then he hopped on a passing truck and kept going.

We gave chase, and what a chase it turned out to be! I was heavily perfumed with "amber liquid," an aroma which any one nearby would have taken for *Eau de Distillery*, and with perfect reason. With the aid of a car we commandeered we caught up with the nimble Nurmi, and took him in charge.

"Why did you run?" I asked him.

"You told me you were Izzy Einstein," he said, "and that was enough."

At the Police Station where we brought

114

him the officer at the desk seemed anything but eager to accept him, even as a gift. I showed my badge, told who I was; explained that he had sold me liquor, and still the officer made out he couldn't understand why I was bringing the man in. He treated my prisoner better than he treated me. But I finally persuaded him to keep him with instructions that friend Taylor was to appear before the United States Commissioner in Providence to answer to the following charges: 1. selling whiskey; 2. possessing whiskey; 3. maintaining a nuisance; 4. interfering with government officers in the performance of their duty.

There were forty-five others who were due to answer charges, so he had no occasion to feel lonesome.

Next morning when I went to the Woolworth Building where the United States commissioner had his headquarters, and where all these people with summonses were due to report, I found a big crowd waiting outside. Newspaper reporters were bobbing about and camera men were on the trigger in strategic locations. I could hear clicks as I

115

ran the gauntlet of them to get inside the building.

“What’s all the excitement?” I asked a friend of mine whom I met in the corridor.

He told me. The news, which I was apparently the last person to learn, was that Taylor had gotten a firm of attorneys to file a complaint against me and two other agents; he had filed suit in the Providence County Superior Court, charging me with “trespass and assault” and seeking \$10,000 damages.

“Trespass and assault,” was good!

I had walked into a wide-open place of business, reached for a pitcher he had served me from, and been given a free whiskey bath. If that’s “trespass and assault,” then I’m a Chinaman.

Damn clever these Rhode Islanders!

While I am standing there learning this piece of news and trying to make sense of it, a deputy sheriff walks up to me with a warrant.

“Are you Federal Agent Isidor Einstein?” he asks me.

I tell him I am, and he arrests me in the name of the law of the state of Rhode Island. Says he’s very sorry to do this, and that he’s

116

in sympathy with me, but that he is obliged to carry out the law. I tell him I understand his position, and to go ahead and do his duty. As a result of my taking it that way and not making any fuss, he lets me ride over to the Courthouse in a taxi by myself, on my assurance that I’ll go surrender myself at the sheriff’s office.

The other two agents who are approached by deputies with warrants don’t take it so peaceably. They get mad. One of them refuses even to own up to his name, till I tell him he’d better, and then he takes a sock at the sheriff and has to be literally choked into submission—which is of course swell stuff for the newspaper fellows to play up, but not so good for the Department. Anyhow these agents both of them try to show they are above the state law, and both get dragged off in handcuffs for the trouble they make.

Oddly enough I, the non-resister, was the one that got the headlines—the Boston *American*, for example, announcing on its front page in letters two inches high:

IZZY EINSTEIN, BOOZE RAIDER, ARRESTED

117

In nearly every paper that sprang the story on its readers—and it went clear down to Georgia—my name was the featured one, even though the account of the scrimmages that occurred didn't list me as an active participant.

Well maybe when a prisoner *doesn't* sock a sheriff, it's news.

Anyhow I taxied peaceably as a Rhode Island clam to the sheriff's office, and there I was shown every courtesy. I had hardly got there when a man by the name of David Korn came asking to meet me; so we were presented to each other, and he proceeded to astonish everybody by pulling out of his pocket \$100,000 worth of Pennsylvania Railroad bonds, with the suggestion that possibly it might be a convenience to me to have a wad of them put up as my bail. He made this offer as a local citizen who was interested in my work. And I'll say it was kind of him, especially as he was a total stranger to me.

Meanwhile there was a great to-do in Wet circles over the way Enforcement had been foiled; the wires to Washington were kept busy, and there were statements that the sheriffs who had arrested us were in contempt of

118

court. Not being a lawyer I can't give you all the wherefores and whereases of the thing, but the upshot was, that after the legal lights got through, the cases against us were thrown out.

As to the booze-dispensers upon whom I served summonses before getting arrested myself, every man of them was held for court. Ditto my prisoner, Mr. Taylor.

Except for these cases, which took me back to Providence twice as a witness, my efforts in Rhode Island were called off on account of Wet Grounds.

119

CHAPTER X

Peculiar Places

IN THE game of disguises I was no more expert than some of the law-violators I went up against. I gave a misleading appearance to myself; they gave it to their places of business. In going after them, it was a case of pitting my False Fronts against theirs.

Here were some examples:

The Casino Stores, 19 Greene Street, just above Canal, did a noticeable business in sardines and dried fish. But one day as I was passing there, I detected a change of smell, which made me think there was something decidedly fishy about this place. A little shopping and then a warrant resulted in a seizure of \$25,000 worth.

The Pure Olive Oil Company on Chrystie Street, right by the Mills Hotel Number 2, seemed to be prospering in a quiet way. Too quiet, in fact. I had suspicions about this place but wasn't able to get the goods on it.



Some high-power salad dressing in the basement of the Pure Olive Oil Company on Chrystie Street.

Unwilling to confess myself licked, I teamed up with another agent, and together we registered at this semi-charity hotel and asked for a room at the back that would be away from street noises. For seven days he and I took turns watching the store from our window through opera glasses and we didn't see a thing that was incriminating. Disgusted, we decided to call it a week and checked out, giving the place a final look as we departed.

It was the right moment. A truck had drawn up there with a load of olive oil cans whose labels announced that they were strictly virgin. But one of them, as it was bumped down onto the sidewalk, gave forth a perfume that swatted me in the nose. Bending over it, I took a deep inhale which convinced me that this stuff must have been made from pretty wild olives. Actually it was rye—\$50,000 worth in all that I confiscated.

An Italian Store on Fulton Street in Brooklyn announced its business with a big sign that read O-Apple-O and the window was full of boxes labeled apple juice and sweet cider. As the time of year when I passed by there happened to be July, it struck me that the sweet cider patrons I saw going in and

121

coming out were kind of out of season in their taste, so I decided to look into the core of this apple matter. It ended with my rolling out 30 barrels of red wine—a procedure which many pedestrians stopped to watch. One of them, a slightly nutty old woman, was invited by some joker to take one of the barrels home with her. And she started rolling it down the street. When I stopped her she offered me a nickel for it in broken English. But the deal was called off.

Bird stores and florists' shops were also interesting in their peculiar ways as dispensers of liquor. Likewise a two-story "private residence" that was running as a distillery with a complete plant and a big stock of finished stuff on hand as well as mash. Yes, these had their points for pinching purposes, but a couple of pawnshops in Brooklyn seemed really a novelty. The fact that these pledge shops, catering to people in no hurry to sign the pledge, were owned by a man named James J. Ryan, might have tipped me off to their not being any too kosher. At any rate, I thought I'd see what three ball whiskey was like. I dropped into one of the shops located at 149 Smith Street, posing as a hooch

122

lover temporarily out of funds, and willing to hock my overcoat to finance my thirst. I hinted broadly but all I accomplished was to get rid of the overcoat in exchange for \$4. No luck either when I came back a week later to redeem the garment. Yet I noticed on both occasions that other redeemers, or supposed redeemers, were taking out packages that might have been their original property, but looked, from the shape of the packages, very like bottled goods.

At the other pawnshop—on Myrtle Street—I pledged a pair of pants for \$2 with no better success. Nevertheless, I saw enough at these places to have search warrants made out, and I avenged my trousers by a pair of raids that netted \$10,000 worth of best quality Pre-Prohibition stuff—especially Kentucky rye, but not forgetting Scotch, vermouth and gin.

These trinkets were all carefully wrapped in second hand clothes and mostly stored away in trunks, so that rummaging for it all was a good deal like spring cleaning in Grandma's attic. But Grandma—that is to say Mr. Ryan—was in Albany at the time. When he came to town, and this little surprise had some influence on his returning, he

123

claimed that the stuff was strictly private stock, so probably his pawnshop customers were just personal friends calling in his absence to ask after his health with a slight idea of drinking it.

While we are on the subject of overcoats and trousers, let me mention a tailor named David Klein who, located on West 72nd Street, used booze for boosting his business. As a special inducement to people to let him do their pressing and dry cleaning, he would supply any wet goods asked for. Deciding that I, too, would combine business with sprucing up, I dropped in there, and, while he pressed my suit, I hid modestly in his fitting room, uttering murmurs of thirst. As a result, he sent me away with a smile in my hip pocket, and I dropped back to bring him along, looking very glum.

Some law-violators were smart about hiding their liquor. In an ordinary enough saloon where I bought a drink, I couldn't find the bottle it had been poured from. The bartender whisked it out of sight during the couple of seconds I was turned away feeding my funnel. I couldn't figure where he had put it. So I stuck around and had another

124

drink. This time I noticed a motion of his hand behind the bar as if he was pressing a button.

"You're arrested," I said, and reached over to the button. Which, as I pressed it, caused a panel to slide open, revealing what I was after.

In a saloon on East 2nd Street, the hiding place was a Victrola, but I spotted it right away, as I'd learned by experience that the unlikeliest place is the one to search first. And this sign of special foxiness made me think that the proprietor must have a good reason to be taking such extra care. So I made a thorough search of the rest of the premises and succeeded in unearthing 22 barrels of whiskey and 2,400 bottles.

Another unusual cellarette was a large stuffed grizzly bear that was so fixed as to afford room for something else beside sawdust. This curiosity was the main attraction of a place called The Half-Past-Nine Club at 73

Eighth Avenue. I went there a few days before Thanksgiving time, in the guise of a salesman for a wholesale poultry concern, offering turkeys at 45 cents a pound, which was then considerably under market price. The bear certainly was an odd number, and its

125

keeper seemed proud of its cleverness, until I seized the stuffing out of it.

I had encounters with live animals too. Breaking through the locked door of the R. & L. garage at 3536 Park Avenue, I found myself in a mix-up of jabbering monkeys. Don't ask me how such beasts happened to be there. All I know is there were six of them hopping around and perching on the hundred cases of stuff we were after—champagne, Scotch and Irish whiskies and Belgian liqueurs. They pestered us and generally interfered with us agents in the performance of our duty but we finally got the stuff away and left the monkeys to whoever it was that cared to own them.

The toughest experience I had with an animal was at the store of one Louis Stusits, where the liquor supply seemed to come from upstairs, as nearly as I could figure out. Deciding to get up there and finding all other ways blocked, I crawled into the dumb-waiter and had another agent, who was with me, pull the rope to hoist me. I was going up in grand style, when right in the midst of my ride, there was a terrible racket down below, and the hoisting stopped. I found myself descending with a very active bulldog waiting for

126

me, and he had the advantage of me, as I was doubled up in my cramped position. It was a mean advantage he took, too, for by the time I could extricate myself from there, my trousers lacked a seat and other essentials.

"You're all arrested," I informed Stusits who had "sicked" this dog on me. "And get me another pair of pants from somewhere."

The best he could do on the spur of the moment, or maybe it was from malice, was a pair of torn overalls.

On Madison Avenue near the Ritz there were two very smart expensive delicatessen stores catering to a Park Avenue clientele. Their specialty was high-hat hooch. But they were so discreet and smooth about it, that you couldn't get anything on them. In fact they wouldn't hardly look at you unless you stepped out of a limousine.

But I made up my mind they wouldn't snub me and I'd get 'em. So I sauntered into both of these stores, one night, in evening clothes as though I'd just stopped in on my way from Broadway to Park Avenue. Asking for liquor, I was informed that they never dealt in such commodities; in other words, they didn't know me that well. But I noticed better

127

known patrons who seemed to be getting it, and as I walked out a young lady swept past me carrying a beribboned basket of fruit that had a bottle neck sticking out.

On the strength of what I'd seen, I returned next afternoon with a search warrant and was just entering the door to serve it, when a truck drove up driven by a young fellow named Murphy. "Psst!" he called me, "do me a favor, mister, will you? I hear they're having trouble here and I gotta deliver some stuff. Would you mind taking a look in there and seeing if everything is all right?" I told him I was glad to oblige him. Went inside and came out again reporting,

"No agents in there that I can see."

He thanked me and I took him and his truck which had fifty cases aboard, and in the store I got five hundred more.

The other delicatessen under the same management, and still a third place of the kind, around the corner on East 47th Street, also yielded excellent pickings for the government.

But garages and warehouses were the places for the biggest hauls. In a decrepit flivver, I rode into a garage at 611 West 46th

128

Street asking to have the engine given the once over. While they were tinkering with it, I took a sniff around to confirm some rumors I'd had of this place. What I smelt was plenty. Result: fifty thousand dollars' worth seized.

Three days later I scored practically the duplicate of it, at the warehouse of the Longacre Express and Van Company, across the street from the West 47th Street police station. At this place I applied in the guise of a victim of the housing shortage (there was a shortage then if you can remember back that far) who needed to store his furniture. I told 'em my wife had gone home to mama because there wasn't any place for us to live. Result: another fifty thousand worth.

At a garage on Water Street, another agent and I posed as people wanting to hire a truck. I let him do the dickering while I sort of strolled around the premises. And all I discovered was 36 barrels of Kentucky whiskey, 70 of “good” beer and similar items, totalling about \$75,000 worth.

On a tip that a big garage on West Broadway was being used as an overnight parking place for bootleggers’ trucks, I and a partner

129

went there in ragged clothes and struck for jobs as car washers. We washed and watched for about a week. Fortunately that sort of cleaning work is done mostly at night, so we had an opportunity of being there when a fleet of three big trucks drove in covered with tarpaulin. We let the men go get something to eat and then we looked under the tarpaulin. What we found was 10 barrels and 250 cases of whiskey with labels which showed the stuff had come from the Bahamas. I don’t know how it got in, but I know it got no further than the Knickerbocker Warehouse.

I gave the newspapers a good gasp by pulling a garage on East 20th Street owned by one “William H. Anderson.” They thought for the moment it was *the* William H. Anderson of the Anti-Saloon League. There was quite a titter till this confusion of names was cleared up.

But for a real juicy garage seizure, let me mention one up in the Bronx, just across the Harlem River from the Polo Grounds. This was a sort of mystery building and we had been watching it for weeks, noticing much suspicious stuff going in there. The doors had three locks and were further protected by

130

a six-inch cross beam, and the windows were soaped so you couldn’t see anything through them and they were heavily barred with iron and wire screened on top of that. In fact, it was protected, as if it were the United States mint. So I didn’t exactly expect a welcome there.

But I paid a call anyhow accompanied by two other agents, knocked on a small old door in the center of the big door. After some waiting, it was opened a couple of inches on a chain and a watchman inside gave us a dirty look out of the crack. I showed my badge and stated my business. The watchman answered by trying to close the door, but I shoved my leg inside and prevented that. The chain, however, had us stopped from getting any

further in and he was squeezing my leg in a way I didn't like. One of my assistants stuck a pistol through the crack and fired a couple of shots at the ceiling and the watchman vanished. We three stepped inside just as he was grabbing up a double-barreled shotgun. We told him he'd better drop it.

The amount of stuff we found lying around there was enough to explain his panic. It took 21 trucks to cart it away. And the nearest

131

estimate we could make at bootleg prices was half a million dollars. As it was all being sold for supposedly medicinal purposes, I leave you to figure how many druggists and hospitals there must have been in the Bronx to need such a supply.

132

CHAPTER XI

Sacred and Profane Wine

WHEN Prohibition went into effect the Jews were not overlooked. Their right to obtain wine for sacramental purposes, and the procedure of obtaining it, were clearly (if you can understand legal language) set forth in a section of the Volstead Act which says:

Rabbis, priests, ministers, and duly authorized church officials, upon making application for the purchase and withdrawal of wine for sacramental purposes, or for other religious rites, shall submit evidence in the form of a verified statement showing the approximate number of worshipers by whom such wines may be used within the period covered by the application and the approximate quantity necessary for such purposes during such period.

(a) *For use in the home.*—In the case of withdrawals for use in religious rites and ceremonies in the home the maximum allowance for each member of a family living together shall be 1 gallon per adult member per year and not to exceed 5 gallons per year for any one family: Provided, The Administrator may allow a greater quantity in particular instances where it is shown to his satisfaction that such greater quantity is necessary.

133

No mention, you notice, of the “sacramental” possibilities of such liquids as champagne, vermouth, and crème de menthe. Those were original ideas which alleged “rabbis” thought up while practising the not-so-spiritual profession known as bootlegging.

What the law does provide—or, at least, what it means in practical operation—is that:

1. Members of any Jewish congregation are entitled to obtain sacramental wine, the quantity, for one family, not to exceed 5 gallons a year.
2. They get it from their rabbi.
3. He gets it on a “purchase and withdrawal” permit, to obtain which he must make application to the government. He must give assurance that the wine is to be used for “sacramental purposes, or for other religious rites.”

And he must submit a verified statement as to the number of “worshippers” in his congregation.

That, I repeat at the risk of annoying you, is the law. And it didn’t exactly authorize the selling of “sacramental” hard liquor to “Jewish worshippers” running saloons under such names as Murphy or Angelo. Which was why the government brought me into the

134

picture. I, as a member of the Jewish faith, was assigned to find out why there was such a remarkable increase in thirst for religion, or vice versa.

I began by checking up on rabbis. One of the first I called on was an alleged reverend who in his applications to the government had been claiming to have a congregation of six hundred. I found him ironing shirts. Another “rabbi” proved to be a recent graduate from the delicatessen business. Another had been a chauffeur. Still another was a student working his way through college in this rather original way. After one visit from me he skipped to Jerusalem to finish his studies there instead of getting arrested here.

“Congregations” weren’t always what they seemed on paper. I traced one group of “worshippers” whose “rabbi” had drawn more than a thousand gallons of wine for them, and I found that the address was that of a tenement building; in a flat on the third floor he had a bedroom, about four by seven, and a mailing list. And that was his congregation.

No less odd was the well-supplied flock of “worshippers” which “met,” according to their address, in what an uninitiated person

135

would have taken to be a butcher shop. In fact, there was even something peculiar about a certain “congregation” that attended “religious rites” at a pool room in Brooklyn. When I dropped in there a crap game was going on and the “reverend” who ran the joint—an ex-prizefighter—seemed to feel I was intruding.

Other rabbis—I checked up on 180 in all, real and fake—cashed in quite openly. Had stores with their names out in front. One such place, located on Upper Fifth Avenue, was run by a rabbi who had a permit to sell to persons certified by other rabbis. I had a hunch that he wasn’t limiting his trade that strictly. So I went in there and without showing any certification, or any other good reason, I asked for a bottle of sherry and a bottle of Rhine wine.

They sold them to me—and got raided for \$50,000 worth, including a swell supply of “sacramental” champagne.

(It does seem funny that this de luxe drink, invented at least three centuries ago, and by a Catholic, should never have been regarded as religious until Prohibition came along, in a Protestant country! And it is even more peculiar, if you like, that after Prohibition

136

had arrived it was the Jews who labeled the beverage “sacramental” for the convenience of their Gentile customers of both creeds.)

For that matter—speaking of things no one would have expected—have you noticed that among Jewish people the members of Reformed congregations which dropped the use of wine from their ritual some time ago, are to-day mostly drawing their allotment, the same as the Orthodox? It seems to be one point on which Modernism and Conservatism are absolutely together. Gallon for gallon.

The amount of wine actually used in synagogues is small. At Orthodox temples—which, as I say, are the only ones that use any—the rabbi serves maybe ten or twenty people. He just pours out one glass. And generally he saves the wine for the children, letting certain ones come forward and have a taste. They look on it as a sort of special treat, and the ones that aren’t given any feel disappointed.

I know, because when I was a postal clerk my children used to get left out. Regularly. Every Friday evening it was the same trouble—“Papa, the other children got wine and we

137

didn’t.” I got sore about it, feeling that they were being discriminated against.

But when I became Prohibition agent and my name began to appear in the newspapers as the fellow who had the bootleggers worried—ah, what a difference *that* made! From then on my children were called forward and given all the wine there was. Nobody else’s children got a drop.

I appreciated the compliment. But I didn’t let it turn my head enough to stop me from seeing what was going on.

Such as, for instance, a box of matzoths that leaked—which is something that matzoths don’t do. Whether or not you are personally acquainted with these disks of unleavened bread we eat at Passover time, I

need hardly tell you that water crackers haven't a whiskey breath. When they have, it's news to the nose. Which is why this box labeled "MATZOTHS," standing out on the sidewalk in front of a Harlem warehouse, struck me as one of the most interesting packing-cases in my experience.

Pursuing the study of unleavened goods inside the building, I made some purchases; then raided, seizing \$10,000 worth—despite

138

protests that it was all purely sacramental. I said that even if it was one hundred per cent "purely," they could tell it to the Commissioner, and I'd tell him another, about camouflaged packing cases.

Harlem had a chance to hear a still louder holler when I confiscated \$35,000 worth of "sacramental" Dubonnet and other religious novelties which had been kept quiet in a second-story room in a garage. I'd got next to the secret by hanging around there as a moving-van man; nobody guessing the kind of moving day I was planning. When it happened they were struck anything but dumb. On the contrary, the owners of the stuff, who were two druggists from around the corner on Madison Avenue, were so busy explaining that I could hardly serve warrants on them. Had to get them in sort of edgewise in the conversation. I was informed that this "wine"—it included vermouth, besides the Dubonnet—had nothing to do with their drug store: was all handled by a rabbi up in the Bronx. And *he* was away on a vacation.

Curious to know how the members of this Reverend's congregation were getting along in his absence, I checked up some of the names

139

and addresses that he had sold to. What I found I You'd have a hard time picturing *that* assortment gathered together anywhere; much less in a synagogue.

Especially one member I visited. "He" was a pork store.

I might mention still another "sacramental" discovery in Harlem—\$170,000 worth seized at a store on Upper Madison Avenue, the removal of the stuff providing a free show for such mobs of people that traffic got stalled and police reserves had to be called out. Yes, I might mention it. But we mustn't get stalled uptown ourselves.

Down on Fourth Avenue and within a whiff of the old Madison Square Garden there was a concern calling itself the Hammondsport Products Co. It, too, offered aromas. These “products” were supposed to come from the grape-raising center they were named after. But the newspapers up there said different, especially after the place was pinched. So maybe Hammondsport Products had no more connection with Hammondsport, N. Y., than the popular cigarette has with its namesake.

Anyway it wasn’t the producing end of the Hammondsport concern that interested me;

140

it was the sales end—a little outside matter called the Rabbinical Bureau, located as far away as around the corner on East 28th Street, and consisting almost entirely of a gentleman styling himself Secretary of the organization. This enterprising gentleman had the reputation of being remarkably obliging to strangers who called him on the telephone. So I gave him a ring, one day, using the password. Told him I’d like to buy ten cases of his sacramental wine if it was as good as I heard it was, and to please make delivery to an Italian friend of mine running a place on Spring Street; he would receive the stuff for me and pay the cash.

The Italian idea seemed to worry Mr. Bureau. With some hemming and hawing he explained that it was better to have some one with a more Jewish name do the receiving. And a Jewish neighborhood would be more suitable also.

So, not to strain his scruples too much, nor put too big a dent in the high standing of his organization, I suggested a little cigar store on Grand Street—guaranteed Jewish, as he could tell from the proprietor’s name, which I gave him.

141

Mr. Bureau thanked me for my cooperation. Said the ten cases would be delivered that night without fail.

I assured him the pleasure was all mine and that he’d very likely hear from me again. But I didn’t say how soon. Or how sudden.

Meanwhile I dropped in on the proprietor of the cigar store, who was an old friend of mine, and we arranged a little reception committee composed of two new “cigar clerks.” When the truck arrived we paid for our stuff with marked bills.

“Got much of a load this trip?” I asked the driver.

“Oh, just twenty cases besides yours,” he said.

“I’ll take ’em,” I informed him.

He said he was sorry but they were promised for delivery to another party that night. If to-morrow I’d call up the Bureau, he was sure that—

But I took them just the same. My ten. The other party’s twenty. The marked bills I’d just handed over. *And* the truck.

Such abuses and monkey businesses! In following this account the question may arise in your mind, and properly, “What was the

142

attitude of the real spiritual leaders of the Jews? How did they take all this? And if so, how much?”

I can answer you. *They neither participated nor countenanced.* I know, because I checked up on 180 different rabbis—their doings, not their sayings. And I’m here to state that although there was a terrible crop of “rabbis since Prohibition,” and although there were dummy “bureaus,” fake “associations,” and what not, and even here and there a full-fledged reverend who forgot his ideals and remembered his pockets—just the same, there were *also* quite a representative number of sincere, high-minded men of that calling; men whose integrity was corruption-proof. It was just unfortunate that *all* weren’t that way—instead of having some that sold Dubonnet to pork stores.

To show you how wide a difference there can be in rabbis, let me tell you a story which incidentally involved the uncovering of the biggest sacramental wine scandal on record, a matter in which I “participated.” But not raking off. Just busting in.

Here’s what happened.

A certain Rev. M. S. Margolies, the sort

143

of rabbi you couldn’t tempt with six trucks of bullion, was called on at his home by a man he had never seen before. This visitor talked in a large way about a wonderful new project for sacramental wines. They were to be imported from Spain, a country he was familiar with, as he had already been importing olive oil from there; that, in fact, had been his regular line of business. But from now on it was going to be wines—the “Menorah

Wine Co.” doing the importing and the “Continental Distributing Co.” doing the rest.

Rabbi Margolies, wondering what all this poetry was leading to and why it was being inflicted on him, finally took the liberty of asking.

The wine gentleman explained. He said it seemed that matters would be very much helped if the Union of Orthodox Rabbis could be got interested. An endorsement from *them* would certainly be a break. So if Rabbi Margolies, as one of the most influential, most revered members—if he would feel like putting in a good ... etc.

It was just a suggestion, you understand.

But it didn't get over. On the contrary Rabbi Margolies was left with suspicions that

144

there was phoney work being done at the crossroads; so he wrote letters to friends of his asking them to get a line on what this olive-oily bird was up to.

From Spain he learned that:

1. The wine, a heavy white Malaga, was of the kind that keeps its sweetness by virtue of having been fortified with extra alcohol. In this particular case the finished product was two-fifths as strong as “100-proof” whiskey. (Whereas *real* sacramental wine is, as I have told you, mild enough for children.)

2. Instead of being “produced under the supervision of a rabbi” as was claimed for it, this wine was merely bought from local people in that business. There was nobody to vouch for how it had been made. And in the town it came from, there were only two Jews: both of them bankers by profession, not rabbis.

3. In order to be able to palm this stuff off in America as kosher wine, some sort of fake certification had to be cooked up. So they got hold of a son of a rabbi in Washington—a young fellow not twenty years of age—and sent him over on the strength of the family name. Posing as Rabbi So-and-So of Washington,

145

this lad “passed upon” wine in Malaga and gave it his “rabbinical O.K.” before it was shipped over here to find its way through bootlegging

channels into select speakeasies and less select saloons.

All in all, information from Spain which Rabbi Margolies pieced together in his study was interesting yet not the sort of thing he enjoyed reading. But it was developments on *this* side of the water that caused him to take action: he found that the Menorah-Continental people, not discouraged at being turned down by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, had got up a fake organization to endorse them and promote sales. It was called “The Assembly of Hebrew Orthodox Rabbis of America,” and, to carry the similarity of names still further, it was headed by “Rabbi G. Wolf Margolies.” The Rev. M. S. Margolies could feel flattered if he cared to. But he didn’t.

At his suggestion, I visited this near-name-sake of his at the “headquarters” of the “Assembly,” located, according to the flossy letterhead, at 203 East Broadway—but less prominent to the eye when you went looking for

146

them. Actually the “headquarters” consisted of one small, dingy room in the hindquarters of a tenement. Here I found his Rabbinical Highness (in real life just a teacher of some sort) sitting in a big chair that took up about half the room, and crowned with a black velvet skull-cap that was supposed to symbolize his authority. This last detail I might have noted without getting its deeper and higher significance, had not a fellow there in the room explained it to me: he wanted to make sure I was properly awed.

The great man himself was less communicative. All I could get out of him was a statement that the Assembly of Hebrew Orthodox Rabbis of America had about seventy members, located in various cities.

“Every one of them a genuine rabbi?” I asked.

His dignity felt hurt. And with cause. For it was on the strength of certifications from him (on his impressive letterhead) that the Prohibition Commission in Washington had given all these “rabbis” the right to sign permits for the purchase of sacramental wine.

I need hardly add that the purchasing was mostly done at branches of the Continental

147

Distributing Co. (The Menorah Wine Co., named for the Seven-Branched Candlestick we Jews venerate, had no branches at all. The Continental had at least thirty.) These stores were scattered all over and did a business which we figured must be pretty big. We nabbed plenty of them. But that didn't cramp the system anything to speak of; all you got in any one place was a small haul, and pretty soon another place would open up in the same neighborhood. They were just outlets. The big reservoir was somewhere else. But try and find it!

I had my suspicions of a warehouse at 110 Bowery, next door to where, in the old days, Steve Brodie had run a saloon. As most everybody had heard of Steve Brodie—how he took his famous chance and jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge, and how he lived prosperously ever after, serving drinks and telling customers the story of his exploit—well, *that* building still got whatever attention passers-by chose to give. But it was the dusty-windowed warehouse next door that I was watching.

One Friday (my lucky day of the week) I noticed a truck standing there being loaded

148

with some interesting-looking commodities. When it started off uptown, I hopped a taxi and followed—over across to Lafayette Street, then north. At Spring Street I overhauled it, flashed my badge, and asked the driver to show me his permit for transporting booze.

He had one, all right. It was made out to a rabbi and called for the delivery of 100 gallons of wine to 132 East 111th Street. But it stated that the *wine was to be transported from the Bush Terminal*.

The driver not being able to explain how the Bush Terminal got moved from Brooklyn to the Bowery, I told him to drive back to where he had started from, because I had considerable business to do there myself.

The raid, which we pulled off that same night (just as soon as the proper papers could be made out), was a howling success. They doing the howling and the government seizing the stuff—with about a thousand bums gathered outside, despite a pouring rain that was coming down at the time, to watch our fifteen trucks being loaded. Some of these Bowery booze-lovers gave us mighty thirsty looks.

149

But we were busy, with a four-story building on our hands.

In the cellar we found two vats containing 2,000 gallons. On the ground floor, 2,500 cases. Plus 500 barrels. The upper floors seemed to have been used merely for bottling and casing.

While we were taking tally the 'phone rang; some one asking to speak to the agent in charge. I went to it and was informed that this was Mr. Musher speaking—from Washington. I recognized the name as being that of the former oil importer.

“Be careful,” said this long-distancer, “and in no case seize the wine. I just came down here and I am calling you up to let you know the situation. I repeat, you had better be careful!”

I informed him I was sorry but that I had to do my duty and take the stuff, as it was stored here in violation of the law. (The only permits the company had were for storage at the Bush Terminal and transportation from there. This Bowery place was just a little something extra.)

But the gentleman at the other end of the wire stuck to his theme song.

150

“I’m telling you, you better be careful,” he repeated, this time adding, as a final frightener, “or I may see President Harding in the morning.

“If you *do* see President Harding,” I said, “give him my best respects.”

He hung up.

Next day some of the newspapers mentioned a rumor that Secretary Mellon had been telegraphed to. If he was, we never heard from him.

We continued to hear, however, from our Continental friends. Seemingly not satisfied with the party we’d given them, they kept on sending out four-wheeled tokens of their enterprise. And these I “followed with interest” wherever spotted.

For example, I nabbed one at the upper end of the Bowery, a block from Wanamaker’s. The driver, with 67 cases aboard, had a swell list of “members of congregations” he was delivering to. “Wilson,” “Moriarity,” “Sullivan,” and the like.

I called on Mr. Wilson and asked him his religion. He informed me he was a Scotch Presbyterian.

The rabbis implicated in this scandal,

151

which the newspapers didn’t neglect, explained that it was a case of their laboring under a misapprehension: they had signed the delivery sheets in

blank with the understanding that fermented wines would be delivered only to members of their congregations. It just showed how people's confidence and sacramental wines could get misused at the same time.

You might have thought that the lesson of this load of grief would have been taken to heart permanently. But no. About a year later a truck filled with similar cases of misapprehension got apprehended right in front of my home on Ridge Street. It was early one morning; I had just rolled out of bed and was looking out of the window to see what the weather was like, when I noticed something interesting standing there—something that looked like things I'd seen before. Afraid it mightn't wait for me, I yanked on my trousers over my pajamas, letting the top part do as an impromptu shirt, and dashed downstairs. I came near losing a slipper but I copped the truck. And it was our old friend the Continental Wine Co.—that regular glutton for punishment.

152



All set for visiting an Albany coal yard that sold liquid fuel
as a side line.



Moving day at Feuer's Warehouse in Yonkers.

If you ask me why the same old “sacramental” tricks still flourished in spite of raids and seizures, all I can say is, I did *my* part, as the records prove; and if the oceans of wine I confiscated were just a drop in the bucket, then it must have been a bigger bucket (or a leakier one) than the world had ever known.

At any rate I learned to be prepared for surprises. And one of the oddest of these happened to me at a “sacramental” place on West 49th Street where they wouldn't sell me anything because they thought I didn't look Jewish enough.

And did I let that shock me out of my perseverance?

No. To serve them right, I sent an agent in there by the name of Dennis J. Donovan.

They sold him. And Izzy Einstein made the arrest.

CHAPTER XII

Beaches and Roadhouses

SALT air is peculiar. Why does this damp air make seaside throats dry (especially if they've just come from the city) and seaside hotels wet?

Frankly I couldn't figure it.

Not being able to and yet unwilling to confess myself permanently buffaloed, I decided to see what might be learned by sniffing the atmosphere in the vicinity of a certain hotel at Rockaway, Long Island.

This hotel, patronized less for its sleeping facilities than for its standing-up ones at the bar, was doing so well that the proprietor thought he needed more scope; he was having an addition built on. It was a case of getting ready to flout the law in a bigger way—for no agent had been able to get him and he felt confident that none could.

But I felt different when I saw carpenters on the job there. It was my cue. After one preliminary look from a safe distance, I paid

154

a business visit, and this time I was in overalls with a carpenter's rule sticking out of my upper pocket and a saw in my hand. Walked in, asked for the proprietor, and struck him for a job.

"Guess we've got all the men we need right now," he said. "But maybe later there might be a chance, if you stick around."

He didn't have to urge me. And while I was sticking around, I took the opportunity of looking around.

"Say, that's quite a bar you've got there," I remarked to him. "Must be all of sixty feet."

"No, not that long. Less than fifty."

"It's sixty feet or I'm no carpenter," I told him. "And what's more I'll bet you on it."

He said I was crazy, but I stuck to my sixty feet. Offered to pay for a round of drinks for every one in the house if I was wrong.

We measured—with five or six volunteer judges looking on—and I was wrong. The bet was poured and I paid. Then I slipped across the street and bought liquor in the place opposite—and came back and arrested the man I bet with.

He was very upset. Said he was a family

man with daughters, one of them a school teacher. For him to be arrested as a bootlegger would put a cruel blemish on them.

I consoled him by mentioning that his rival across the street was in the same boat. This news seemed to soothe him wonderfully and I collected the two of them.

Coney Island was a simpler proposition. People there were so busy pulling in the suckers, they overlooked the possibility that they might get pulled in themselves. At many a place all I had to do was to appear in the guise of a shivering bather asking, “Any chance for a real drink to warm a fellow up?”

Some places there you didn’t even need a bathing suit to get in on the wet. You just mentioned the water and got something else. For instance, at a drug store on Brighton Beach Avenue (it was near where you come out of the subway) I dropped in with a couple of other agents and we asked for a soft rubber ball to play with in swimming. Just then all the lights went out and candles were placed on the refreshment tables where we noticed people were sitting longer than is usual for soda drinkers. So we joined those resting in the dimly lighted store and suggested thirstily,

“How about another kind of ball—one with some Scotch in it?”

This visit was so successful we decided to celebrate by having a little something to eat at a big restaurant on Surf Avenue. But we didn’t “eat” all the “food” listed on our check, which included such items as “1 lobster,” and “1 crab”—meaning a bottle of wine and a Manhattan cocktail. To cure them of the error of their ways we pinched the place.

Law-violating in a more expensive, high-class style was to be found at places further out. Long Beach, for example. And to the limousine trade Long Beach meant Nassau Hotel. It was a hotel where just anybody who happened to be listed in Dun and Bradstreet was sure of plentiful service—especially if he remembered to bring the contents of his safe deposit box along. Paupers and Prohibition agents weren’t wanted.

Bound that I wouldn’t be discriminated against, I rolled up to the door one evening about six o’clock with a “party of friends, including a couple of swell blondes. I myself was in white flannels, white shoes, and Panama

hat, and I twiddled a cane. We barged into the dining room as if we owned it, and we

157

had a right to feel that way after what I paid the head waiter for a table by the window.

Otherwise, I was so busy discussing real estate—how much an option on the Singer Building would cost me—I hardly had time to order the drinks.

“Anything else?” the waiter asked at the conclusion of our little meal, preparing to draw up the big check. I paid him first and then I told him; and then the pinch was so quiet that the hundred or so other people there didn’t know anything about it except that the place had suddenly dried up.

Switching, for a change, to the more exclusive North Shore, I did an act at Smallwood’s roadhouse in Glen Cove, near where Mr. J. P. Morgan and some of his friends have their summer cottages. Here I drove up in a Packard with another agent as my liveried chauffeur; I being a big mining man from the West, in a bright silk shirt and yellow spats, come to see what the Long Island Smart Set could do in the way of shaking an ankle. It was 1 A.M. when I arrived and there were at least two hundred of them busy at it, stopping for refreshments in between—until I ended all that by inviting the head waiter and

158

my waiter to have a little ride into town to the Federal Building.

Woodmansten Inn, Joe Pani’s famous roadhouse on Pelham Parkway, was another pippin ready to be pinched—if you could get in there without being spotted. Well, I trotted out my Broadway glad rags and staged the same old limousine approach that had worked elsewhere. And they fell, the same as any new audience does for the magician’s pet trick that he’s been using these twenty years. Anyhow, I had no trouble getting tabled among the high-flyers, nor the least difficulty about buying drinks at \$1.25 per. The hardship came afterwards, when I had sprung my news: I had to sit up the rest of the night guarding all the stuff I confiscated, as our trucks couldn’t get out there till morning. That job, with no orchestra or floor show to help me in my knock-down-and-drag-out battle with sleep, was *some* assignment for a “gay sport” in a dress suit to hand himself. I can’t say, though, that my fatigue was much grieved over by the management. It

was what I was guarding that they were upset about. And what was ahead of them.

Among other out-of-town resorts I remember

159

the name Roth House. And with good reason. This combination inn and cabaret, located at 180 Main Street, New Rochelle, the town that was “Forty-five Minutes from Broadway” according to George M. Cohan some years ago, but is only half an hour now, had facilities such as few hotels were able to offer or even think up. That is to say, it fronted upon the Boston Post Road for the convenience of motorists, and (still thinking of them) had at its back a small inlet of Long Island Sound, which made possible the landing of liquor “right off the boat.” Hence you might call it a wayside filling station that could never be emptied because of its unlimited supply.

Anxious to study the wonders of this unique establishment, I arrived there, bag and baggage, in the guise of a wealthy real estate man. Took the best suite they had, saying I didn’t know just how long I’d stay; it depended on a deal I was putting through. Meanwhile my interest in real estate prompted me to cast a professional eye around the hotel itself. I noticed that the bar was quite a good piece of architecture, well varnished, well kept up, and

160

apparently quite ably operated by a negro bartender.

When I let this colored gentleman know whom he had sold liquor to, he fainted. So I knew, from other cases where such a thing had happened, that there must be a good-sized hoard on the premises. And, sure enough, I found, down in the basement, a secret room containing \$25,000 worth.

Then it was the proprietor who was taken weak.

Maybe his ship had just come in and this was the cargo. If so, the next time it arrived the dear old place wouldn’t be quite the same.

I, myself, dabbled in a little boat-work out at Oyster Bay Harbor. Not that I ever joined the rum-chaser fleet; no, this was just something special, due to my happening to pick up a bit of information about a yacht that was due to sneak in there at midnight. When it appeared—you could see it picking a place to anchor, out just beyond the reflection of Lloyd’s Neck Light—I was right in my element: terra firma. And I was watching. I

watched a small yawl put ashore with a load, and I was ready on the shore when it came in, with a little speech in the name of the government,

161

case of “yawl received and contents noted.” Except that instead of one case there were one hundred and ten of them. And a bootlegger’s motor truck waiting handy for me to confiscate it and commandeer it at the same time, with plenty of prisoners to do the heavy work.

So I felt that my outing in the salt air had been beneficial.

Incidentally we copped the yacht, which was called the *Jessie B*. And I’d always wanted a yacht.

162

CHAPTER XIII

Prescription Pads and Drugless Drug Stores

THE Eighteenth Amendment said nothing about doctors. But the Volstead Act did—as follows (Title II, Section 7):

No one but a physician holding a permit to prescribe liquor shall issue any prescription for liquor. And no physician shall prescribe liquor unless after careful physical examination of the person for whom such prescription is sought, or if such examination is found impracticable, then upon the best information obtainable, he in good faith believes that the use of such liquor as a medicine by such person is necessary and will afford relief to him from some known ailment.

And “ailment” didn’t mean “thirst.” But pardon my interrupting the Law, which goes on to say:

Not more than a pint of spirituous liquor to be taken internally shall be prescribed for use by the same person within a period of ten days and no prescription shall be filled more than once. Any pharmacist filling a prescription shall at the time indorse upon it over his signature

163

the word “cancelled,” together with the date when the liquor was delivered, and then make the same a part of the record that he is required to keep as herein provided. Every physician who issues a prescription for liquor shall keep a record, alphabetically arranged in a book prescribed by the Commissioner, which shall show the date of issue, amount prescribed, to whom issued, the purpose or ailment for which it is to be used and directions for use, stating the amount and frequency of the dose.

In other words the Commissioner would have a line on chronic sufferers—how protracted their cases were, and how they were responding to treatment by needing more or fewer doses. Indeed, you might think that the Law covered all loopholes and leakholes. Anyhow the drafters thought so.

But in March, 1921—fourteen months after Prohibition went into effect—Attorney General Palmer suddenly panicked them by pointing out that the restrictions on the prescribing of alcoholic medicine said nothing about anything beyond “spirituous liquor”—which left the drug-store door wide open for light wines and beer.

This was certainly a blinger.

To cure it the friends of Law and Water promptly got together a stop-leak called the

164

Willis-Campbell Bill which they pushed through and soldered on to the original Act, making things apparently look one hundred per cent trickle-proof.

Under the new regulations beer was definitely ruled out as a “tonic.” Ditto ale, porter, stout, and all other malt intoxicants. Stuff for dosing purposes had to be either straight “spirituous liquor,” or something “vinous” to the extent of not more than twenty-four per cent alcohol.

For prescribing these medicines a doctor had to have a permit from the government and was allowed only one hundred prescription blanks every ninety days, issued to him in pad form. In other words he was “good” for 405 pints a year. And no more—unless he chose to make special representations to the government under a clause which made provision for cases where “for some extraordinary reason a larger amount is necessary.”

This limitation, when first announced, brought forth squawks from certain medical societies and associations. They claimed that it cramped their style. But, over against their protests made collectively, I’d like to point out the fact that *individually* a lot of

165

doctors—I don’t say the *leaders*, for they were making good money anyway—but a lot of the ordinary or hang-out-a-shingle kind (especially the just-graduated ones) indulged in a umedical practice” of selling their prescriptions to “the trade.” And profitably too.

It was quite a system. A young doctor would be sitting in his office wondering why there weren’t more sick people in the world and why so few of them paid their bills, when he would receive a surprise visit from some one in the best of health. The visitor would remark on what nice weather they had been having lately, and then get down to business,

namely, liquor prescriptions. For a little pad of one hundred numbered sheets he would be glad to offer the “regular market price” of one hundred dollars. Possibly the doctor could use that amount of money? Well, just possibly! If so, all that was required was to sign each prescription in blank—the name of the patient (a poor dear cousin of John Doe) would be filled in later. By repeating this transaction every ninety days, a struggling doctor could get along better than the medical associations seemed to realize. While they kicked, he cashed in.

166

The drug store’s part in the procedure was also interesting. The pharmacist drew on permit enough liquor to take care of his prescription trade. He accounted to the government for the quantity he sold, by filing the prescriptions. They were his evidence of good faith.

But there was one little possibility. The pharmacist, upon drawing his supply for deserving sick people, might just happen to take a notion to dilute, cut, and stretch it. With the aid of something out of a glass jar marked SPIRITUS FRUMENTI (grain alcohol to you) and some coloring matter such as burnt sugar, he *might* make two or three pints grow where only one grew before. Oh, it was just a possibility! But you know what chemists these pharmacopoeia fellows are. Give them an inch and they’ll make a gallon.

Supposing, then, that a druggist has made the most of his medicine with the result that he has two or three times as much as he has to account for to the government. What does he do when a prescription is handed him? Why, he fills it with some of his special blend that won’t bite your tongue but may burn it. If it helps the sick person’s ailment, so much the

167

better. If it doesn’t, then better luck in the next world.

Should a customer come in *without* a prescription ... ah, that makes a difference—in price. And there are formalities to be gone through. For example, at a certain drug store on Seventh Avenue just below the park, you had to say, “I’m a patient of Dr. Bell.” That showed you were passed by the board of censorship as a very sick man, and a bottle of first aid was handed you from the back room.

If trade was slack the druggist could dispose of his surplus to bootleggers. If, on the other hand, it was a “progressive” store with patients

arriving in taxis and limousines, he could increase his drawings of liquor for dilution, by the simple process of buying up prescriptions. So the bootlegger, the prescription broker, the lame-duck doctor, and the drugless drug store worked hand in glove. And the scofflaw public had such blind faith in the “reliability” of “medicinal” liquor that plenty of times they bought plain ordinary bootlegger goods over a counter that had toothpaste displayed underneath. With such tokens of harmlessness before their eyes, they felt perfect confidence. Never guessing that

168

such a thing as a tube of toothpaste was a mere trifle, mere window dressing, to a pharmacist whose real business was bootlegging.

One of these pharmacies-in-appearance-only was “medicating” an entire neighborhood in Brooklyn. But only people who were personally known could buy, as various disappointed agents had discovered. If you weren’t a neighbor, it was just a drug store, with a nice refreshing soda fountain where you could buy Coco-Cola till the cows came home, and never get a smell of what was in the back room.

But I was determined to get in on the “neighborly spirit” or bust, and I was trying to plan myself a welcome there, when Independence Day, popularly known as the Fourth of July, handed me the very opportunity I was looking for. On that day (1921) Brooklyn was the scene of a big Wet Parade, every marcher wearing on his lapel a large badge announcing “We Want Beer.” As I, too, was a beer seeker, I fell into line; singing more truthfully than my co-marchers had any idea of, that God only knew how dry I was.

When the parade broke up, it broke towards such places as you can imagine. And beer

169

was obtained without the formality of waiting for Repeal. It just flowed.

Well, I obtained all I needed for souvenirs, and then I dropped in at the “exclusive” drug store that I was anxious to know better. My badge got a grin. I said it had been a great parade all right, but rather fatiguing; felt I needed a restorative, preferably rye.

The fellow eyed me kind of hesitatingly.

“You’re the new butcher that’s just opened up around the corner, aren’t you?”

“Glad *somebody* knows me around here,” I joshed, remarking that the job of breaking into a new neighborhood was no cinch. “Wish I was doing as well as *you* seem to be,” I said.

“I can’t complain,” he admitted. And handed me a pint already wrapped.

I put it in my pocket but I didn’t walk out—the way agents generally do when they’ve obtained evidence and are all set for a warrant. Instead, I hung around admiring the store and playing up to the druggist as the fellow who had made a success in the game I was bucking.

“Give me back that bottle,” he said suddenly.

170

“What?” I protested. “I paid you for it, didn’t I?”

He winked.

“Sure, you paid me three dollars for a pint of the purest. Open it and see.”

I unwrapped it and was surprised at the color. Took out the cork.

It was pure water.

“Just a little system we have,” he explained. “If anybody we aren’t sure of tries to buy liquor, we sell him what I sold you. If he’s a snooper come to make trouble, it serves him right. And if he’s on the level, he finds out the ‘mistake’ as soon as he gets home, calls up or comes back to ask what the hell; and I apologize, explaining why, and send the real thing over to where he lives. Yessir, Safety First is our motto.”

It didn’t save him, however, from the bother of explaining more fully—to the judge.

There were so many of these “medicinal” liquor places masquerading as pharmacies, I got to be a regular drug-store addict. One day I raided seven of them at a clip. And I don’t mind saying that a pale clerk behind a drug counter can act meaner than the toughest bootlegger. He gets flustered and loses his

171

head and is liable to pull anything on you if you aren’t careful. So I learned to be very careful indeed.

The prize package of surprises was handed me one night when I paid a duty call at a drug store out in Bronxville. This store, run by a man named Steinmann, was located on Pondfield Road right next to the police station—which you might think was a little nervy, considering the amount of

liquor being dispensed. I thought so myself, and then I discovered that *I* was the fellow regarded as nervy. When I was in the midst of removing \$10,000 worth of stuff from a basement room I'd broken into with raiding papers (drawn up on the basis of evidence I'd bought on a previous visit), a cop sitting inside the police station spotted me through the window. He followed up his gaze with a flying leap out into the street and nabbed me as a bootlegger, truck and all.

I had some difficulty changing his mind; he clung to the idea that bootleggers were any kind of strangers from far, far away intruding upon innocent druggists next door. Finally, however, he unclutched me, and I started into town with the load, only to be *again* held up

172

as a bootlegger, this time by a *city* cop. Really, it seemed almost a coincidence!

At that I had less trouble explaining myself than a lot of doctors did who were netted as a result of these drug-store raids and exposures. About two hundred thirst-medicine men in New York City found themselves in the same fix as noodles in noodle soup. Many pleaded guilty and were sentenced by the court. And the officials in Washington, who had been receiving no end of complaints about the medicinal racket, were enabled to get a true picture of it from the repentant medicos themselves.

Among the interesting revelations was the fact that the doctors got barely their share of the harvest. The canvassers who bought up their prescriptions—in pads or “as many as they could spare”—at from a dollar to three dollars per (though the latter price was exceptional even in this government-limited market), generally went straight to the druggists, and bought the liquor these prescriptions called for. And there was where the real profits came in. The druggist, who had paid perhaps \$35 a case, twenty-four pints, sold to the bootlegger for about \$60. And the bootlegger

173

in turn disposed of it to his select clientele for \$125 or thereabouts. So the profit score on a typical deal would be, if reckoned on a “per case” basis, something like this:

	<i>Investment</i>	<i>Gross profit</i>
Doctor	Conscience (if any)	\$24.00
Druggist	\$35.00	\$25.00

In this friendly way countless thousands of pints, drawn and prescribed in the name of illness, went to such “patients” as speakeasies, night clubs, delicatessen stores, and so on—went, in fact, wherever the going was good.

Of a total of nearly 60,000 doctors in the United States who were “prescribing,” I leave it to you to figure how many were “helping” humanity, and how many were just helping themselves to the gravy. But before turning this matter over to you for your best judgment, I’d like to point out that:

1. Previous to Prohibition the ailments which called for liquor hadn’t been so plentiful, and sick persons had felt their doctor was doing the right thing by them in giving them pills, not pints.

174

2. The “necessity” of the bedside Bourbon bottle in such cases depended, and still depends, on where you live. In some states of the Union a diagnosis of “just perishing for liquor” wasn’t recognized; if patients were perishing, they just perished, that’s all. Yet the population figures seemed to hold up under the strain.

3. (I’m telling you again.) The healing hooch sold on prescription at innumerable drug stores was adulterated—wicked stuff! Some I got samples of would have made a healthy man worse than ill if taken in any quantity, and just a little was too much for any one.

Yet the diligent docs went on signing little pads of paper and the clever chemists went on committing adulteration. And the strange thing about it was that most of these druggists displayed signs announcing that they analyzed beverages. But of course that didn’t mean their own. What *they* sold you was ... well, what they sold you! Even if it was more suitable for mules than invalids.

But they did analyze. For a fee of one dollar or two dollars a “conservative” law-violator

175

could obtain a scientific-looking report on “sample submitted”; which document would enable him to assure his guests, “You needn’t be afraid, people. I’ve had this stuff tested.”

Actually, in many cases at least, all that such a patron of science could be assured of was that “that last lot Tony had sold him” wasn’t rank poison. For druggists had their own health to think of, and bootleggers showed a marked preference for constructive criticism of their wares. Any over-conscientious hoocho-analyst who crabbed the game might as well be choosing his casket in advance. Hence the testing was apt to be a trifle broad-minded.

The fellows who really dished the dregs and boiled away any alibis were our Federal chemists. *They* knew their Ethers and their Ethyls and had no hesitation about marking them present. And, if I say so myself, I gave these lads some pretty ones to play with.

For example, some “genuine imported Scotch” doctored up out of an anti-cootie preparation known in the exterminator trade by the crude name of lice-killer. In its original, humbly serviceable form this was a denatured

176

alcohol product. Effective but hardly famous. Imagine our surprise, then, at learning that phenomenally large quantities of it were being exported to South America. We wondered what sort of condition things down there could have got into.

The mystery was cleared up, and South America’s reputation was saved, by the discovery that this “exporting” got only as far as Rum Row—the booze fleet hovering outside the Twelve-Mile Limit. There, rocked in the cradle of the deep, the lice-killer was reborn as Scotch Whiskey by the simple processes of re-distilling, cutting, coloring, and labeling. What had gone out as a death-dealer for cooties, was brought back and sold as an imported treat for connoisseurs. I bought some of it myself, in a select neighborhood.

Another odd one was Nozo. I found this stuff being sold on the East Side on push carts as well as in saloons. Analysis showed it to be a weird sort of three-per-cent beer, something like the stuff that people drink in Russia under the name of kvass. Whatever it was, it was six times as strong as the law allowed; so I hunted around till I found where Nozo was coming from.

177

It proved to be a store on East 11th Street that *looked* innocent enough when I walked in there, but it smelled peculiar. I said to myself that

anybody who knows Nozo knows there's something going on here. And, sure enough, in the basement I discovered three copper boilers Nozo-ing away to beat the band—cooking up the stuff out of stale rye bread that was more than a month old, with water, malt, hops, and sugar.

The fellow was a foreigner, and I asked him:

“*Kvass* is it?”

“Nozo,” he said.

I told him he'd have to explain better than that to the Commissioner. And I pinched the works.

Still queerer was a concoction I saw the effects of, though I never saw the stuff itself. I happened to be in Night Court testifying in a case, and afterwards the judge, who knew me well, invited me to come up and sit beside him while he attended to the pickles that some drunks and disorderlies had got themselves into.

One fellow made a plea that he was an honest, industrious citizen whose troubles

178

were due entirely to the influence of “squirrel whiskey.”

The judge, never having heard of this beverage before, turned to me for professional knowledge on the subject. But I was stumped too. So he had to ask the defendant, who explained:

“Yes, your Honor, it was squirrel whiskey. And I *know* it was because I made it myself.”

“Out of what?” he was asked.

“Why, the regular way, your Honor. Out of potatoes, some cabbages, and old ropes. But, gee!” he added, “never again!”

Whether or not the name and formula originated with him, squirrel whiskey never took widely. It was a sort of thing that goes only with the limited few.

Still, there's no predicting what people will drink. Or where.

For example, I was walking along Broome Street one day when I saw a line of bums out in front of a soda fountain. Somehow the looks of them didn't seem to square with the kind of place they were at; you'd never have picked them as the malted milk or pineapple sundae type. So I joined the line to find out what was going on.

179

When it came the turn of the second rummy in front of me, he said, in a husky whisper:

“One strawberry.”

And he slipped what he got—it was whiskey—into his back pocket.

The next bird, just ahead of me, took a “double lemonade” that was very much the color of water but cost him two bucks.

Seeing it was now my turn, I took a little of both flavors. And the proprietor.

CHAPTER XIV

Izzy Bizzy Upstate

HOW SHOULD I know that David Harum was somebody in a book and not a hotel proprietor? At the time the book came out I was a young fellow in Tarnow, Austria, just hoping to come to America some day.

Anyhow, when I drove up in a big two-horse sleigh to this David Harum Hotel in Homer, New York, and asked for the proprietor, Mr. Harum, it seemed that the joke was on me. They decided that I must be a member of some hunting party who didn't know anything at all.

Well, I was willing to let them have their chuckle and drinks on me all around. Harry Cortwright, the actual proprietor, got friendly and showed me around the place, which was a large frame building. I was particularly interested in a door marked with a red QUARANTINE sign, apparently pasted on it by the Board of Health. Informed that the

181

“patient” in there had influenza, I got suspicious and decided to find out how sick he was. So I busted the health regulations and walked in on as complete a booze supply as a country hotel could have illegal use for. And I put it down in the David Harum arrest papers, even if it wasn't in the book.

People in central New York were smart fellows all right. Next door to the Messenger Hotel in Cortland, where I paid one of my little visits, there was a tire shop that dealt in automobile rubber wares that were full of hooch. If you punctured one, it squirted. I decided that that was too much Floating Power. Although I may not have had that name for it at the time.

At Oswego, a town I stopped in just two hours, the proprietor of the Hanley House claimed that the stuff he sold me was merely a compound called Stingo, and that the government had O.K'd it as permissible. Maybe it was Stingo to him, but it was whiskey to me. And the two bottles I took, along said the same. I gave him a chance to argue the fine points of the thing in court.

In Binghamton there was a Firemen's Convention. I joined the visiting delegates by

182

outfitting myself with a cap and badge. As a result, a lot of liquid fire got extinguished.

A year later I did better than that at Beacon, where the Hudson Valley Firemen's Association was about to convene. Here, by getting in a couple of days ahead of time, I saved firemen from 300 gallons' worth of harm that was waiting for them, and took 15 prisoners. I'm sorry to say, though, there were yelps as I departed.

Albany I visited numerous times and made so many raids that one day when I was testifying in court in connection with 13 different cases, the newspapers reported that about 100 bartenders and bootleggers were on hand to get a good look at me so I couldn't surprise them. But I managed to get results just the same. In a single night I went the rounds of more than fifty places and brought in a flock of arrests. In the case of one of them that I raided, there was a funny defense brought up. The fellow who was accused of being the owner said it belonged to his mother, and to further prove his innocence, he stated that he *must* be all right, because he had just applied for the job of Director of Prohibition in Albany. Even called me to

183

bear witness that he had informed me he was applying for it. So I suppose I should have kept that in mind in raiding the wide-open saloon which he or his mother owned but "had no connection with."

Between raids and court hearings there was time for me to visit other cities, and I hopped around all over that part of the map, never announcing what place I'd bob up in next. In fact, if I was bound for Troy, I'd drop hints about Schenectady. Or I'd mention to a taxi driver that I was headed for Rensselaer—and then I'd turn back and do a round in the town I was in.

Cohoes, eight miles north of Albany, was where I had the wettest experience. There were a number of stills there, running wild and uncontrolled till I nabbed them. The biggest of these belonged to a man located on the Mohawk River, which runs through the town. When I informed him he was under arrest, he attempted to get away by jumping into the river. This annoyed me as I was in my good clothes—blue coat and flannel trousers. I took off the coat and, keeping the pants on, jumped in after him and managed to out-swim him before he could reach the other

184

side. At that, though, he had the best of it because I let him put on dry clothes, while mine were still sopping wet when I took him to the Station.

Another fellow who gave me a lively time was a man named Sargood, that ran a tough roadhouse called Chicken Coop Inn, up at Walloomsac, just this side of the Vermont border. It was kind of out of my way, but I went there because the New York State authorities had been making a lot of complaints about it. This fellow, they said, had a bad record in Vermont. Not knowing exactly what I'd be in for I planned to use my cigar salesman stunt and drove up there one evening, peaceably enough, but prepared for trouble. The place was tough, all right. There were some mighty rough customers sitting around and Sargood, himself, wasn't any too cordial; but I got my evidence. Then I raided the place and in an out-building seized a large still he was making terrible moonshine with. These details attended to, I informed him I'd have to take him along with me. He asked if he might get his overcoat, because it was a cool night and he saw that my car was an open one. But I didn't dare risk letting

185

him go to fetch it; I was afraid I mightn't see him again. So I let him have mine. And pretty nearly froze.

When we'd got as far as Hoosick Falls, about twenty-five miles from our start, he tried some stall about communicating with a friend, and while we were discussing it he suddenly made a dive for my evidence and I barely prevented him from smashing it on the pavement. It was a foxy move because, in my successful efforts to save the booze, I let him slip and we had quite a chase. But I caught him. And brought him the rest of the way to the lock-up in Troy. The last news I had of Mr. Sargood was that he was serving time in Vermont, after completing a term in New York.

Speaking of correctional institutions, I might mention that just across from the New York State Reformatory for boys, I stopped to buy gas at a sort of garage-roadhouse place and took occasion to "correct" a 100-gallon hooch kettle I found distilling away there at a great rate. In fact, *more* than my trip between Middletown and Goshen got broken.

Goshen, too, brings up a memory. It was a town where "hoss trading" was still one of

186

the local industries. There was one fellow particularly who was slick at it. He'd buy up old race-horses that deserved to be pensioned and he'd sell them to the farmers as being "practically as good as new." I'd heard, though, that he had a side line at which he was equally smart. So I decided to visit him and his stable.

Announcing myself as somebody who had just bought a farm over at Monticello and needed a horse to farm with, I found I was cordially greeted. He showed me fifteen or twenty horses and talked withers and cruppers at me until I agreed to buy a terrible plug for \$50. It was worth maybe \$3.50. I paid him \$5 on account, and to celebrate the deal, I bought a drink from him. Five minutes later he found himself at the Station—just another little proof that Barnum was right: people will always let you fool them if you go about it in the right way. But you have to use discretion to get them. If I had walked into the place and just asked for a drink he wouldn't have sold me.

Saratoga was a bigger and wetter field, with something else flowing besides what came out of the mineral springs. I took a summer cottage

187

there for my family and managed to combine business with pleasure—as a news jotter suspected I might when he commented in the paper: "Hip carriers remember what the goblins do if you don't watch out."

But he was wrong in thinking I was after people carrying flasks. No, that was never in my line. Instead I dressed up in a nifty outfit and dropped into the grill room of the famous Grand Union Hotel one evening when high society and the high class sporting element were taking a little time off from their turf loving. The place was packed but the head waiter gave me and my guests a good table, figuring I was a big tipper. Later he seemed shocked when I reached into my wallet pocket for the expected tip and pulled out a search warrant. And he seemed to feel even worse at my piling up the seized cans of liquor I found in the center of the room, even some of the high-toned guests were a little astonished. I assured them nobody would be disturbed except sellers of illegal liquor. And after a little flurry, they seemed to get the idea and showed much interest in my routine.

Fortunately the news didn't get over town so quick as to prevent me from rolling away

188

in a limousine from the Grand Union to other little jobs in Saratoga. On the way to the United States Commissioner's office, I raided a café and also a store that was selling beer made on the premises. So I was able to bring in variety as well as class.

Other events I staged as a vacationist who wasn't willing to be idle, included half a dozen hotels, some well-known restaurants, and a couple of jazzy inns at Saratoga Lake, where I posed as a Broadway actor who was kind of partial to ponies.

I took just enough time off to raid a brewery in Cohoes, and then came back and pinched a number of hot-dog stands that were selling something under the counter outside the entrance to the Saratoga race track.

Possibly these activities of mine may have inspired Mr. John E. Madden to name a colt he was just bringing out "Revenue Agent." Anyhow, this colt surprised them all, and some newspaper wise-cracker suggested that I was anxious to buy it out of sentiment.

But my sporting ambitions were confined to buying liquor and locking the sellers up.

CHAPTER XV

Squelching Yodels in Yorkville

OUR German-American friends took to Prohibition as readily as nothing at all. They just couldn't imagine such a thing.

To be sure, they had heard rumors of something strange happening to the beer and schnapps supply. But these rumors dated from a time when they themselves were rumored about as "Hyphenates," "Kaiser-loving Brewers," and other backhanded cracks; so the whole thing to them was just so much Liberty Cabbage.

Accordingly, they passed the pretzels, said "Prosit"! and let it go at that—except for an occasional "Ach du lieber Augustine" and a few yodels.

As a result, conditions in local Teutonias such as Hoboken and Yorkville (a district of Manhattan in the Foaming or Yeast Eighties) were extremely trying to the Prohibition authorities. It was felt that this sort of lawless

190

lushing couldn't, or at least shouldn't, go on much longer if there was any way of stopping it.

I was delegated. They picked me because I was Austrian born and had heard what beer looked like. So I went up there and found that Eighty-sixth Street—the main street or Suds Boulevard of the district—was as wide open as ever it was.

At a big place called the Yorkville Casino I showed up with a trombone under my arm and intimations that "music hath thirst." The reception I got was so good, I came back for an encore, this time bringing a search warrant, which I presented to the manager, Mr. Harry Stromberg, with my compliments and the suggestion that I'd like to sort of look around the dear old place and see what was behind certain doors.

He said he couldn't read it.

So to buck up his eyesight I busted into a few of the doors and began collecting bottled goods.

This seemed to help him better than any glasses you can get at the optician's, for he said, "Lemme see that paper again." And

191

the rest of the doors were opened for me with his keys instead of my hatchet.

By the time I left he was “considerably relieved” of illegal beverages which he was due to answer for in court.

Another musical event I participated in on East Eighty-sixth Street was at Mozart Hall, where the Ladies, Singing Society of the neighborhood was holding a masquerade. On the strength of rumors that there was apt to be considerable humidity in the air that evening, a couple of other agents and I answered the question, “Shall we join the ladies”? by hiring Yama-Yama costumes and joining the stag line at the bar. We found that anything from a swig to a snootful was obtainable, even if you weren’t known. And we weren’t known, yet.

When we *did* make ourselves known, the dancers got excited and raised such a hullabaloo that the whole neighborhood came running to see what was happening. Mozart himself might have been a little surprised could he have watched, as that mob did, the spectacle of us stern Yama-Yamas pallbearing twenty-five thousand dollars’ worth of stuff out of his hall.

192

The problem of a flock of smaller yodelries—some of them with warbling waiters in Tyrolean “comedy shorts”—was something else again. To get these places would involve a series of calls, and the joints were so bunched together that any such round of visits would arouse suspicion. Something novel yet plausible would have to be schemed out.

I was trying to figure it when I read in the newspaper that there was a milk strike starting—some row between the companies and the drivers, with the latter walking out on the argument. That gave me an idea. I decided I’d do a little walking out myself. So, in a borrowed Sheffield Farms cap and the regulation white coat, I went strolling in company with a couple of other agents, similarly rigged. We hit Yorkville registering enthusiasm for the Drivers, Union and Liberty, and using, “Are we downhearted? NO!!!” as our bottle cry.

The stuff served in response was equally vehement, even though we went through the motions of asking for near beer or ginger ale. And not a suspicion!—when a suspicion in time might have saved nine places. Instead, seventeen bartenders were landed in the course

193

of what was probably the shortest and least milky strike in the history of American milk-driving.

If the wagon I was off of in Yorkville never existed, I can assure you that anyhow a laundry truck I voyaged to Hoboken in was real. But not genuine. It announced itself in large letters as WET WASH, which was one of those half-truths that people get deluded by.

I got hep to the inner significance of this truck late one night, when I noticed it standing in front of a delicatessen store, and caught a glimpse of the kind of “coats and aprons” that were being unloaded from it. That store certainly seemed to be going heavy on laundry!

I watched till the last clinking package was dragged out; then, while the men were in the store collecting their bill or maybe taking orders, I hopped into the empty truck and hid there, covering myself with some wrappings I found in the dark.

Pretty soon the men climbed aboard, feeling very satisfied over having accomplished their evening’s toil and never suspecting they had a stowaway. But if the joke was on them, the jolts were on me as the truck bounded

194

along—the way that only an empty, homeward bound truck can—till we rumbled onto a ferry and I had a chance to count my bones to see if they were all there.

Finally we halted and the men got out.

So did I—unexpectedly, you might say. (Or they would tell you.)

The “laundry” we had driven into was a garage on Ferry Street, redolent with the kind of suds that Hoboken is famous for. 500 barrels of it. And I was interested to meet them professionally.

When I had made out my little laundry list and attended to the necessary routine details, I informed the men that since *I* had bummed a ride off them, it was *their* turn to have one on me. Positively.

Thus did Hoboken and I get acquainted. And I came back. It was too fruity a field to let go with that one experience. I paid a number of visits there to the famous waterfront—with piers, sailors, saloons, hotels, but no water that you could discover. German and beer were spoken and drunk fluently. Fortunately my funnel and I were equal to the opportunities, and I showed my Deutsches seamanship by sporting a bo’sun’s cap and a

195

gold chain across my bow hefty enough to heave an anchor with. Numerous bartenders who seemed to have a hard time remembering M. Volstead were given cause to remember me. If they didn't *stay* scared, it must have been the climate on the Jersey side of the river.

On the Manhattan side there was a trickier German problem in regard to the smuggling of liquor from ships. I and another agent were assigned to find out how this stuff was getting in. We hung around places all up and down West Street, which faces the piers. But not a smell of a clew did we get.

Then one day in a sort of saloon restaurant that we were visiting (there'd been complaints about it) I got acquainted with a Heinie sailor named Kurt. He addressed a remark to me in broken English and I answered in his own language. We soon struck up quite a conversation, he telling me he was an oiler on the Hamburg-American liner *Hansa*.

"Well," I said, "I'm from Hamburg myself." I told him I'd come from there some years ago and was now in the real estate business in New York.

196

This gave him the idea I probably had some money. Asked me if I'd be interested in buying some real stuff, guaranteed to be off a boat.

I laughed and said I'd heard that story before. But he insisted this really was off a boat. To prove it, he produced a sample quart from his pocket. It was labeled: "Pepper Whiskey—Fine Pure Bourbon." And it had every appearance of having been made in Kentucky.

"How much?" I asked him.

"Six dollars, he said. "But if you could use a fair-sized quantity, I could let you have it at a wholesale price of five dollars a bottle." Also offered to supply kümmel and cognac.

I and my partner admitted we were interested. We told him that while our regular business was real estate, we did some bootlegging now and then on the side, and that we knew what the market was. If he could make us a better price, we'd buy from him.

This attempt to beat him down got him peeved. He said that he and a fellow who was in with him had paid \$3 a bottle for the stuff in Germany, which left a margin of only \$2; and that the U. S. Customs men at the pier

197

made him shell out \$1 a bottle for letting the stuff pass. In other words, if we bought 1,000 bottles for \$5,000 he and his partner would make only \$500 apiece on their investment, trouble, and risk.

We took him up on the 1,000-bottle proposition.

Maybe we were too quick about it, or maybe we had asked too many questions; anyhow he got suspicious and refused to have any dealings with us unless we let him search us to find out what sort of people we really were. "It's all right with me," I said, following him to a back room—but managing, on the way there, to slip my shield inside my shoe. My partner was able to do the same.

The way we were searched was a caution! That fellow examined every stitch of our clothing down to our undershirts. At last, having turned our pockets inside out without finding any fatal papers, cigar coupons or even a post card, he said he was satisfied; and passed over the sample bottle, for which we paid him his six dollars.

Resuming our negotiations where the disrobing act had interrupted them, we agreed to start our 1,000-bottle deal with a first instalment

198

of 50 quarts, to be delivered the following night. We'd meet him near Pier 86, North River, and he'd have the stuff with him.

So next night I and my partner were Johnnies on the spot at the foot of West 46th Street. Our German friend kept his date all right but informed us he had to have fifty dollars in cash right away, to bribe the guards with. He said they were holding the whiskey and refused to extend him credit. This seemed an odd situation, for one branch of the Revenue Department to be asked for money to give another branch. But my partner and I had no chance to debate the arithmetic of the case. We just gave him the fifty bucks—in marked bills—and let him romp with it.

Pretty soon he came back accompanied by two other Heinies, all three of them loaded up like commuters on Saturday night. We told them to put the stuff into our machine that we had waiting there.

"Now about your money," I said to Kurt, and led him around the corner. He accepted \$200 in marked bills. Then I arrested him.

The other two, guessing that something was up, ducked away from my partner before he

199

could take them into custody. And Kurt broke away from me; only this guy was more original—he tried to take a running dive into the North River. But we finally rounded up all three and took them to a place where they wouldn't be so frisky.

As by-products of this little episode there were complaints and upheavals in the Customs Department—certain officials being anxious to know what became of the fifty-dollar bribe in marked money; also, why Kentucky liquor, exported with no bond tax paid on it, was being allowed to come back in as personal belongings of steamship employees.

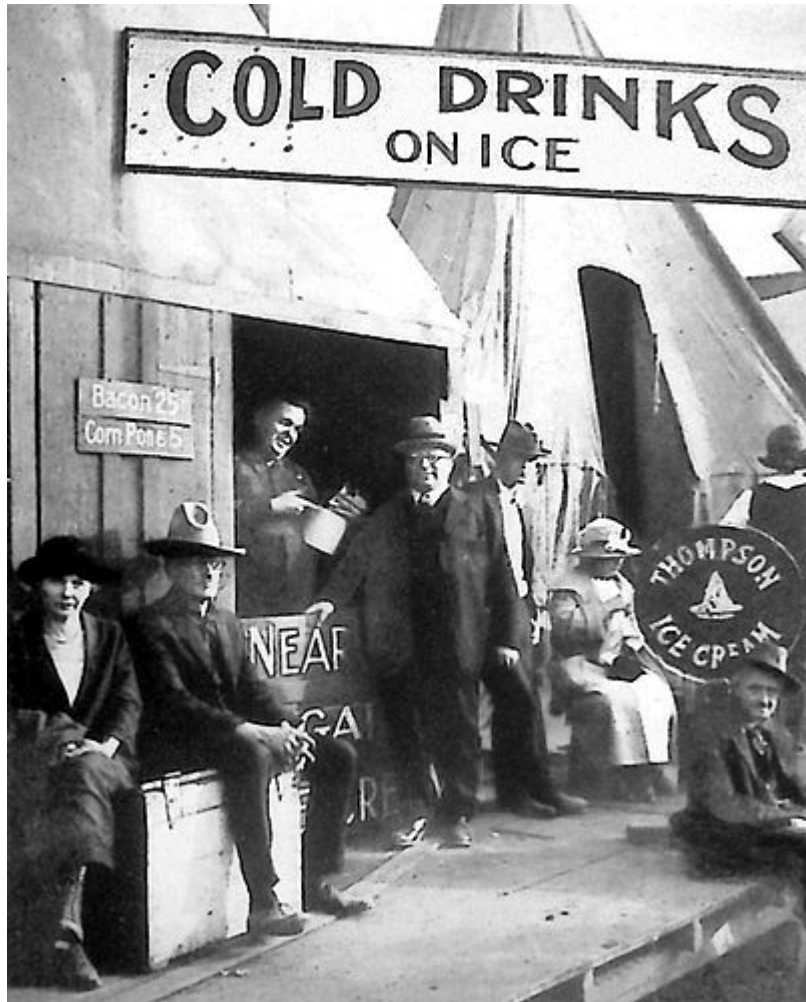
I never followed up these scandals in other people's departments, for I believed that a bootlegger-chaser should stick to his last. Any cats that had got let out of the bag weren't *my* cats.

But to get back to the Germans. Perhaps the most hilarious time I ever had with them was one New Year's Eve at a big restaurant on 125th Street. The place was packed and everybody was celebrating full blast, when the orchestra, with an eye to business for the management, struck up "How Dry I Am."

I joined in with the rest—only louder. And



The author and a lady preacher from Omaha share honors as the featured speakers at a temperance rally.



Entertained as a guest of the Universal Movie studios, Los Angeles, California, where they asked my advice on the details of a saloon scene.

I guess I was fairly conspicuous among those present, because I had on a rah-rah get-up as a college sport, and I wielded a mean rattle. Anyhow I put such pep into this theme song that the proprietor, a man by the name of Christian Beisler, came over and asked me to rise and sing it as a solo. Which I did.

And then I announced:

“This concludes the evening’s entertainment, ladies and gentlemen. The place is pinched. For I am Izzy Einstein, the Prohibition Agent.”

With this specialty the evening’s entertainment was brought to a close.

CHAPTER XVI

Mopping the Wetness of Motor City

PEOPLE with zinc linings could have drunk some of the stuff sold in Detroit without being harmed by it. But for ordinary constitutions it was fierce. And when drunk by mechanics in the employ of the automobile makers, it gummed things up generally.

The situation got so bad, with more and more of this rot-gizzard being bootlegged as Grade A liquor “smuggled in from Canada,” and with more and more mechanics reporting for work in a condition of hangover, wooziness, or heebe-jeebies—well, the motor companies stood it just so long, and then they got sick of standing it.

As a result I was sent for by the Commissioner in Washington. Telling me of the complaints that had come in from Detroit, he gave me orders to go there and spend several months, if necessary, in gathering evidence on the basis of which a big raid could be

202

staged. He cautioned me, however, against spilling the government’s beans by letting my identity get known. I wasn’t to put up at any hotel in the city—not even a “men only”—and in general I was to “lay low” and be there without seeming to be.

Thus instructed, I got off the train in Detroit looking as much as possible like no one in particular. I went at once to Hamtramck, that curious little town that has been swallowed by the rapidly growing Detroit. There I found a cheap boarding house, moved in, and told the fellow that ran it I was looking for a job. He wished me luck, hoping I’d stay on, and I proved how ambitious I was by starting out right away to “look for work.” And, believe me, I had plenty cut out for me in a city the size of Detroit, especially since I’d never been there before.

Keeping my eyes peeled and asking no questions except the kind that a stranger would ask if he was looking for a job, I visited the districts where the different automobile plants were located and noticed what sort of fellows the mechanics were: how they dressed, how they walked and so on. I found there were quite a number of genuine unemployed hanging

203

around these plants. And almost none of them had overcoats, although this was still winter. And a *cold* winter. The fact was, as I discovered later on when I got to know them, a lot of these men had pawned their overcoats to buy liquor. So long as they could procure warmth inside, even if it was near-shellac, the outside didn't much matter to them. But *I* felt the temperature—plenty!—when I got rid of my main protection against the breezes and became a bird of a feather flocking with the bunch. The difference between me and the others was that they, as I say, warmed their insides, whereas the funnel installed in the pocket of my work shirt got my share; and any pints or half-pints I was able to buy were “taken home.”

Most of these men I tagged around with were likable, good-hearted fellows, ready to share their last nickel. I felt truly sorry for their hard luck—though you could see, in many cases, what was the cause of it: too hefty a yen for liquor. If any of the crowd I palled with should ever feel sore at me for being a fake mechanic-out-of-work when they were *real* ones, let me assure them I more than shared their sufferings. Those second-hand

204

overalls I tramped around in were *thin*! And as for friendship, I was a better friend to them than the saloonkeepers that took their money and gave them stuff that was next door to poison.

At one place I'm thinking of, the system of getting their coin and then booting them out had been reduced to a science. It went like this:

1. The rush for the rum.
2. Broke.
3. The bum's rush.

This establishment, located not far from the Windsor ferry, was open day and night, but the proprietor was as cagy as he was hard-boiled, and nobody had been able to get him. I was told that every agent in Detroit had been in there, at one time or another, and invariably had been spotted right away, or else he was ready for them with a nice assortment of soda-pop. Anyway not a drop of evidence had been obtained against him, though everybody in that part of town knew he was selling liquor.

I made up my mind I'd effect a purchase—somehow. So I “happened by” there at various

205

times of day and night, taking note of what was going on and trying to figure what would be the most favorable hour. I decided, for special reasons, that one o'clock in the morning would be about right. Trailing in at that hour I found things pretty quiet, and over around the stove—it was one of those old-fashioned ones—a lot of Bowery types (as we'd call them in New York) were slumped in their chairs, getting some sleep where it was warm. I picked me an empty chair and joined the dozers. Or rather, I half shut my eyes and pretended.

When I'd been doing this for maybe an hour, a big six-foot bouncer came over and shook me.

"Hey, you!" he barked. "Whaddaya think this is we're running here—a free lodging house?" It was a gentle hint to buy something or get thrown out.

I stammered an order for near beer.

"We don't sell any," he barked, making it clear to me that when he said buy something he meant buy something.

So I reached inside of my shirt and drew out a little purse I had hidden there, hobo fashion—though some bums, I noticed, kept

206

their money in their shoes so nobody could snatch it while they were asleep. To be extra genuine, I had this little pocketbook all wrapped around with string, which I began to unwind under the scornful gaze of the bartender and the bouncer, finally producing a dirty dollar bill as the price of a half pint of whiskey.

This qualified me for a night's rest. The arrest came later when we sprung our big round-up.

The day before that grand haul-in was due to happen, I was worrying over the fact that there was one place on our mopping list that no warrant was being drawn up for. This was a place called the Grand Union Hotel, opposite the ferry, run by a man who was choosy about the people he sold to. There were plenty of complaints but no evidence so far.

Well, better late than never, I decided, as I studied the situation from the wholesale fruit market next door, where there were men working all night. Along about four A.M., I invested in some lemons, having already gone into the fruit business to the extent of wearing a long white coat and the antique straw hat

207

such as is worn by market men, out of sentiment apparently, long after the robins have flown south. With this outfit I barged into the hotel, on the pretext of borrowing a light, and found the proprietor on the job, as I'd figured he would be because of the hours his best patrons kept. Remarked to him, while lighting my cigar, that I was stuck with a lot of lemons; wondered if he could use some. I showed him the ones I had with me as being part of the consignment. He liked them so well at the price I named, that he offered to take the whole lot, and I pretended to be so glad at getting rid of them that I up and bought a bottle of his liquor.

Next morning—that is to say a few hours later—this purchaser of imaginary lemons was one of forty-six individuals served with surprisingly real warrants for arrest. Nobody I'd been after was missed, for there was no tip-off. It was the first big raid Detroit ever had.

When these men had their day in court some funny things came out. It was shown that certain property owners had been in on the illegal traffic by charging extra high rents to “near beer” tenants that sold liquor. Naturally,

208

however, there were denials: the least hint that these gentlemen were profiting in this way shocked their respectability something terrible. One landlord indignantly declared that ever since his name appeared in the newspapers as being among those involved in the bootlegging exposure, he had been swamped with telephone calls from people wanting to give him orders for booze—a statement which got a swell laugh.

Even the question, why is there a place called Hamtramck, got dragged in at the heels of the numerous Hamtramckers we had netted. (I hadn't favored neglecting any law-breakers doing business near where I lodged.) Mr. Yellowley, chief of Prohibition agents at the time, recommended a cure for conditions in Hamtramck by the simple process of *abolishing* Hamtramck: he wanted it annexed to Detroit so Detroit could police it instead of merely policing Detroit. But whether the citizens of Hamtramck ever gave him his wish or not, I don't know. I never followed it up. I was too busy following up bootleggers in other places.

Not that the problem of Detroit was over and done with. On the contrary it would have

209

taken pretty nearly the entire Prohibition force in the United States to have *kept* things as dry as they were immediately after the big raid. Dispensers of redistilled poison did business at new addresses, or even the same ones as before; and for customers who could pay the price there was smuggled liquor from Canada that actually *was* smuggled. In fact, this branch of the business, with Ontario only half a mile away, developed into a regular regatta. It didn't make any difference how many boats got nabbed; there were always more slipping in.

Our authorities protested to the Canadian Government, intimating that a little neighborly help toward enforcing our law would be appreciated. So the officials over there held a conference in Windsor. I happened to be still in Detroit as a witness in some of the cases resulting from the raid, and I thought I'd just take a ferry ride over there for the novelty of traveling *south* to Canada, and to "observe" what the sentiment of the meeting might be. I didn't announce myself. But they recognized me. And the sentiment was Best Wishes, but that Ontario could give little assistance to the United States in checking the

210

flow into Michigan, because shipping liquor was legal under Dominion and Provincial laws. That is to say, we could expect no help, and unlimited hooch. In short, judging by results, it was a typical conference.

If the Canadians on their side just politely didn't care, Mr. Henry Ford on this side, with 200,000 people in his employ, cared a lot. His welfare staff cooperated with us all the way along and showed their appreciation of the work we were trying to do. On one occasion when I visited the plant (it's bigger than some of the countries in the League of Nations) I had the honor of being the first outsider to see, and be presented with, a copy of Mr. Ford's famous order on the subject of liquor: the warning which said that any employee who showed signs of being a drinker would be fired.

Reading it right there where so many millions of dollars' worth of precision machinery was in operation, it struck me as being very fair. As reasonable as a No Smoking sign in a garage. Anybody would feel that way about it after seeing one of those steadily-moving assembly lines where the whole procession

211

could be gummed up by one unreliable bozo. Mr. Ford was right!

Being due to return to New York, I brought the copy of the order back with me and gave it to the newspapers as something of great public interest. They played it up big. And in the news story that went all over the country they saw fit to mention Izzy Einstein along with Mr. Ford—a compliment I certainly appreciated.

They never guessed, though, how lucky it was I brought the copy of the order in my traveling bag instead of in my pocket. Here's what happened. I got on the train at Detroit pretty tired out after some strenuous days with not much sleep in between, and I was sitting there sort of relaxed, not thinking about anything in particular except that I had better turn in early—when suddenly I became aware of a couple of suspicious characters sitting opposite me across the aisle. They had the “bootlegger look.” And what I could catch of their conversation didn't sound any too lawful.

Noticing me glancing in their direction they switched to baseball, talking louder than

212

before and acting wonderfully unconcerned. You could see they were playing safe.

I decided I'd get a line on these birds. So, to encourage them to talk freely, I yawned, rubbed my eyes, and settled back in my corner as though I had completely passed out of the picture. I was so tired I could have fooled anybody.

I even fooled myself!

Some hours later I came to out of the most perfect imitation of a nap that anybody ever gave. The men I was “observing” were gone. So were my fountain pen, watch, and wallet. I was a stung sleuth.

As I recall that little experience, which seems more comical to me now than it did then, another one bobs up in my mind: something that happened on the last trip I ever made to Detroit as a Federal agent. Because of my previous activities there—investigating, raiding, testifying, and so on, such as I have told you about—I was afraid I might have trouble slipping into town without being recognized. So I made myself out as the worst greenhorn that ever struck the place. Staring around like a lost sheep, I let a porter at the station lead me to a taxi. They asked me

213

where I wanted to go. I fumbled for a minute, then dragged out a slip of paper with the name and address—a small, cheap hotel located not very far away. And off we started.

It was twelve-dollars-and-forty-cents, worth on the meter when we stopped.

This gyp driver, satisfied that I was a boob from Boob Corners, had taken me for an “all-expense cruise” through Detroit and surroundings. And there wasn’t a thing I could do about it. If I had protested that he seemed to be detouring too much, I’d have been “out of character” and would have risked losing my disguise. And if I had called a cop, I’d have had to give my name. He just had me.

Yes, I would say that if you’re looking for ingenuity of one kind and another, you’ll find plenty in Detroit.

CHAPTER XVII

Horses of Another Color

THE BIGGEST money in the bootlegging industry wasn't on the retail end. Saloons, speakeasies, and other places catering illegally to thirsty patrons, were just "trade outlets." And so was the small-time bootlegger delivering a couple of quarts of "real Canadian whiskey" or a case of "guaranteed gin" to the home or office of one of his clients. Back of all of them was the System—the real bootlegging Industry. It involved smuggling, manufacture, storage, and general wholesaling.

The smuggling I don't have to tell you about. You've read plenty in the newspapers on the subject of Rum Row, and any map of the United States will tell you how well this country is provided with coast lines, and that our Canadian and Mexican borders aren't so skimpy either. At any rate, in spite of seizures and seizures liquor kept leaking in. Floods of it.

215

As there was bigger business and more profit to be made by adulterating it so that each quart of genuine was stretched to *three* quarts—well, bootleggers weren't exactly in business for their health. Or other people's. They gathered the profits and cut the liquor, disguising its true nature with high-class labels cleverly faked. There would be a lot of one particular "brand" out on the market as something very special, and then, when customers were beginning to think it wasn't quite so wonderful as it had been represented to them, *another* brand would be given a play. By this policy they were kidded along and the cutting business made fancy profits.

I've told you of some establishments of this kind that I discovered and raided. From what I found in the way of equipment, labels, adulterants, and so on, I got a good insight into how the game was worked. I can assure you that if one of these pure-food fellows that worries about a little thing like benzoate of soda, had ever taken a look at what the hooch cutters were preparing as beverage for the human inside, he certainly would have had a shock. It just showed what a beautiful faith there was in labels on bottles and in the assurances

216

of bootleggers that they could vouch for the stuff personally.

The fact was, the retailer himself got it on faith.

The place it came from was generally a warehouse that looked like any other warehouse and took care to be mistaken for one. In fact, such places were hard to locate since, unlike saloons, restaurants, and so on, they made no bid for patrons; you couldn't trace them by their popularity in the neighborhood, because they had nothing to do with anybody. Suspicious-looking trucks were the only clues. By following them to what seemed to be headquarters, I discovered some of the biggest hooch reserves in the entire industry. I've told you about the Menorah place on the Bowery, and some others, but I don't think I've mentioned one on Third Avenue where I found and seized \$350,000 worth of port, sherry, assorted Bordeaux wines, vermouth and cordials—all alleged to be kept there for non-beverage purposes, (The raid uncovered a scandal about withdrawal permits, and some staff people got arrested. But let's not dig up unpleasant details.) I'd say, though, that the most complete and carefully run of these mystery

217

establishments was one I got wise to in Yonkers, called the Feuer Storage and Warehouse Company, located right on Main Street. To gain access to the \$100,000 worth of liquor I took away from there it was necessary to overcome such "discouragers" as a series of steel doors with combination locks—like trying to break into one bank vault after another, till you came to *lots* of them at once. But I got in. And I hauled the stuff away in one of Mr. Feuer's own vans. *Our* truck wasn't big enough.

The fact that this gentleman had big trucks garaged downstairs was one of the reasons for his success up to the time I caught him. It was the ideal arrangement for a wholesaler: storage facilities plus hauling facilities.

For that matter, most of the places where I made my biggest hauls had that combination—garage and warehouse. I got to be quite a man about garages.

But for housing a still there was nothing like a good old stable. It offered less of a fire hazard than a garage, and its out-of-dateness made it seem like just some old building that people didn't pay much attention to. It could play dead convincingly.

218

On Perry Street in Greenwich Village there was one of these old-time-looking stables. I noticed trucks going into it loaded with something that

looked more like barrels than loads of hay. This gave me quite an interest in the place. I went in and struck for a job looking after horses. Said I was down and out and would take anything they chose to give me. They took me on and for four days I was nursemaid to about fifty horses, feeding them, currying them, and cleaning up after them. It was active duty all right! Just the same I found time, between horses, to investigate what was going on there; then chucked my job to go get a warrant.

What I raided and uncovered was a big alcohol plant such as the bootlegging industry depends on for its raw material. Down in the basement, hidden in a sort of room that had been partitioned off in one corner, there was a 200-gallon still. A beauty. It was heated by triple gas burners and it had a six-inch vent-pipe running up to the roof. The stuff it turned out—180 proof, no less!—was collected in 5-gallon cans of the kind used for automobile oil; and the trucks that took it away were let right down into the basement

219

by a freight elevator and loaded there. I found 300 gallons ready to ship. But not a teaspoonful of mash anywhere on the premises. This was strictly a re-distilling business using denatured alcohol to start with.

I gave a sample of the finished product to one of our Federal chemists. He reported that its effect would be slower than wood alcohol. That is to say, you wouldn't get the harmful effects for two or three days, but that gradually it would give you a formaldehyde lining. And *that* was the kind of stuff being supplied to the trade as "grain alcohol" to be used in cutting imported Scotch and Canadian or "medicinal" rye. Also to make bathtub gin.

Well, if alcohol was to be used and sold in large quantities, it had to come from somewhere, and this kind of place was where it came from. Denatured alcohol, permissible but not drinkable, could be obtained for such requirements as varnish manufacture, painters' supplies, barbers' supplies, rub-down mixtures, and so on. Since Prohibition went into effect the demand for this "39 B," as it was called, had quadrupled. Maybe this was due to the increased enthusiasm for varnish, or possibly not. All you could be sure of was

220

that a remarkable number of concerns were “using” astonishing quantities of denatured alcohol. When you visited their plants you couldn’t see where it was all going. In fact, you saw very little of it at all, because it never got to their plants. Instead it went to dummy companies who sold it to other parties.

Some perfume concerns insisted that they couldn’t maintain the high quality of their products unless allowed to use pure grain alcohol. A few of these put up such good arguments that they got what they wanted. But when we checked on the quantity that went into actual perfume, it wasn’t anywhere near the amount they had drawn. Which goes to show how easily a pure grade of alcohol can evaporate in process of manufacture, or leak out the back door.

One interesting perfume concern with a flowery name was located up in the Bronx. I visited it late one night, finding nobody there at that time. By using a ladder I discovered near by, I climbed up and looked into one of the upper windows where a light was showing. Gluing my face to the glass, I could make out three big stills. I wanted to ask somebody about them, but I had to hang

221

around there three and a half days before anybody showed up; then a fellow came along who explained that he was the chief chemist. Admitted he was engaged in the redistilling of denatured alcohol under orders from the officers of his company. Showed me their names on a letterhead—which was just what I needed for giving them all summonses. And him too, of course. As far as alcohol was concerned, all I found was 17 barrels of denatured and 22 barrels of re-distilled. Which for perfume making seemed quite a lot.

But in the court arguments, they claimed it was some scientific experimenting that was being done there. Maybe so. But I burned my tongue sampling the result of their experiments. And I figured they were selling from 50 to 75 barrels a month—which, you might say, would have been enough to have scented up all of Hollywood, and then some.

To prevent this sort of re-distilling the government tried various formulas for making industrial alcohol strictly industrial. They put in stuff that gave it a sickening smell. But the bootleggers hired smart chemists and learned how to get rid of that. The government made the poison more poisonous. And

the bootleggers fixed that. The government even put in kerosene that *couldn't* be distilled out and it *was* distilled out. Finally the government made alcohol muddy-looking and guaranteed against bootlegging. And the bootleggers fixed that too!

Apparently there was an answer to every chemical trick, except that denatured alcohol could never be made really harmless. But when did a little consideration like that ever worry anybody in the illegal booze business? The public would buy the kind of stuff put on the market as drinkable gin and whiskey; so the stills simmered.

As for moonshine, in and around New York City or any other big city, it was mostly limited to little one-gallon stills that people experimented with at home, making raw stuff they could scorch their insides with if they weren't particular about what happened to them. The materials for making such stuff were procurable at any Malt and Hops store. The big bootlegging industry, with its 100-200-gallon stills running night and day in stables and other places, could afford to laugh at such amateurs.

But I put a crimp in their chuckles.

CHAPTER XVIII

Just Plain Luck

ON MY way down town to the Federal Building one morning, I stopped at a Park Row fruit stand for an after-breakfast apple. I had just paid for it and was comparing my watch with the clock on the old *Tribune* Building when somebody tapped me on the shoulder. It was a truckman.

“Say,” he said, “are you the fellow I’m supposed to make delivery to?”

Just like that!

Something about his manner gave me an idea of what kind of delivery *this* was.

“Sure,” I told him. “Got it all with you?”

“Two cases—one King George whiskey and one Bacardi. That’s right, isn’t it?”

I assured him it was perfect. At my bidding he carried them into the lobby of the *World* Building. Then he acted like he wanted his money. But instead I gave him some news about his being unavoidably detained

224

on a charge of transporting liquor. I pointed out the Federal Building across the way as the place we were bound for.

That fellow was almost as brilliant as a bootlegger who approached me in Albany at the time of a State Convention. I arrived there, along with 600 other people on a special Convention train, and as we poured out of the station, I, of all the gallant 600, was the one person that this bootlegger picked out to sell liquor to.

I told him I wasn’t in the habit of risking my eyesight on hooch bought from strangers in the street; he’d have to show me where he got it from, and what sort of people I was dealing with.

So he took me to the place. I met his boss and was shown the supply. Consequently, I was able to land a whole kettle of fish instead of one minnow.

Another fellow equally obliging in meeting enforcement half way, was a man sitting in an auto that was parked at Fifth Avenue and 22nd Street, just below the old Flatiron Building. I mightn’t have noticed him, though, if I hadn’t just taken out a fresh cigar, and found I had no matches.

225

“Excuse me,” I said, approaching him. “May I borrow a light?”

He gave me one. The wind blew it out and I had to bum another. He laughed and we sort of fell into conversation.

“How about some *real* fire?” he suggested with a wink.

I pretended I didn’t quite understand and he made himself clearer. Then when I had shown I was open to sales argument, he asked what quantity I’d be interested in.

“Ill take all you’ve got,” I said.

And I did.

Still another bootlegger proved his chumminess by getting a flat tire in front of my own doorstep, so that I was able to confiscate a truck with 25 cases, as a little piece of home work, which I brought into the Station House.

In fact, the neighborhood I lived in offered me many presents of this kind. For example, one day I stopped for a sandwich at a food stall on Rivington Street, which is just around the corner from my home. A truck driver eating next to me and having his cup of coffee, seemed to be in a friendly mood.

226

I commented to him that that was quite a big load of rag bales I noticed he had.

“Rags nothing!” he grinned. “Something better than that in those bales.”

I let him see I was duly impressed and he made the most of my “well, wells,” by telling me this was ten cases of whiskey, and only one of many loads he had been hauling to the railroad yards.

Then I handed *him* a surprise. Ordered him to drive me to the yards where such interesting things were going on; and there I found a box car of “baled rags” whose insides totaled 500 cases of liquor—all being sent to a fake-named consignee in Cleveland. It seemed that liquor out there was scarce and brought \$100 a case. Possibly my diverting this \$50,000 carload from that market into Uncle Sam’s cupboard may have raised the price still further. At any rate, I was glad I’d had my sandwich.

A loose heel was also productive. This accident happened to me one morning as I was going to work. I stopped in at a cobbler’s on Orchard Street for an emergency-repair job. Sitting waiting while he hammered, I noticed an interesting hooch smell

227

which seemed to be coming from an inner room.

“Oh, boy!” I sniffed. “What you got in there?”

“Take a look,” he chuckled.

With one shoe on and one shoe off, I took him up on the invitation by hobbling into the back room when I discovered a 30-gallon still simmering sweetly as it changed a mixture of prunes, molasses, sugar, and water, into the sort of stuff that makes mountaineers so wild. There were several gallons already made, and 150 gallons of mash awaiting treatment. By the time I came out from these exhibits the cobbler had finished with my job.

“Well, I guess you’re attended to,” he said, handing me my shoe.

“And now it’s your turn,” I informed him.

The same pair of shoes brought me another unexpected piece of government business, when I dropped in to have them shined one day at a stand on 42nd Street and Third Avenue.

“How’s business?” I asked the Italian fellow who was wielding the rags—just by way of being sociable.

228

He told me that as far as shines and tips went it wasn’t so hot, but that he did better with his side line—liquor. Kept it in the money drawer. Said I’d be surprised to know how many “gempmen” asked him for it and bought. And I suggested he might possibly be surprised to know I was Izzy Einstein. In fact, his surprise lasted all the way to the Station House.

I, myself, received something of a shock, when my car was bumped into by a load of liquor, disguised as cases of fruit. The driver of this truck, and I, each got out to see what harm had been done; and while he was looking at my bent fender, I was looking at his “fruit.” There was a box of it that was leaking.

“What kind of stuff is that?” I asked.

“Candy,” he said.

Which gave me such a taste for sweets that I followed the bonbons to their source, a four-story building at 77 Washington Street, and there I found a room full of girls filling trays of chocolates with something else than cream or nuts. And that was only one department of a large plant that was engaged in hooch cutting and labeling on a grand scale. Adding

229

up all that I took I figured the bump had resulted in this concern's being nicked for \$100,000 worth. And I'll say it jarred them!

Even when Lady Luck wasn't so generous I tried to show my appreciation by copping anything she handed out no matter how small it was. For example, one day I was waiting for a street car on Myrtle Avenue in Brooklyn, when a fellow came over and asked me if I could speak Polish.

"Sure," I replied in that language.

He asked me how to get to Greenpoint and while he was waiting for the car I told him to take, we got into quite a conversation. Noticing me glancing at a heavy parcel he was encumbered with, he grinned and explained:

"Gallon of whiskey."

"Good stuff?" I asked. "You know, there's a lot of poison going around nowadays."

"Oh, this is *good*," he assured me. "I get it from a Polish woman who makes it. And, believe me, she knows how."

I said I wished I could get hold of some, and the upshot of our meeting was that, instead of his going to Greenpoint, he took me to the Polish woman's house and introduced

230

me as a special friend of his. There was plenty of fresh-made liquor there and a substantial still in which the woman had percolated it.

I felt almost sorry to have to break up the party by seizing the outfit and arresting the bootleggeress.

But another street-car experience had bigger results. I was trolleying in Brooklyn one afternoon, when I happened to overhear the conversation of two women sitting next to me. I wouldn't ordinarily have paid attention, but what one of them said about her boy friend just as she was getting up to get off, had a ring of interest for me.

"Big day," she confided. "He's driving a load of stuff down to the Albany Night Line and they're paying him well for it. So I'm meeting him and we're going to step it to-night."

She moved toward the front of the car. I wriggled my way to the back and we got off at the same corner. I followed her to Pier 31, North River, where the steamer *Berkshire* was about to sail. The Packard her boy friend

had driven was already aboard, due to be collected in Albany by somebody else.

231

It was collected in Albany by somebody else—including the 55 cases it was loaded with—but not by the somebody who thought he was going to collect it.

A queerer booze-chariot came my way one time when I was posted on a corner in the lower East Side watching for a big truck. I had waited and waited there, getting chillier and hungrier, as what had been six o'clock became eight o'clock. Finally I went into a cigar store and called up to find out if any further word had been received. The answer was:

“Must have been a slip-up somewhere. No use waiting any longer.”

I came out figuring I had scored a blank for the evening, when I looked and here was coming an old fellow with a long beard, pushing a decrepit baby-carriage. He was a strange looking mama and the baby was so covered you couldn't see its face.

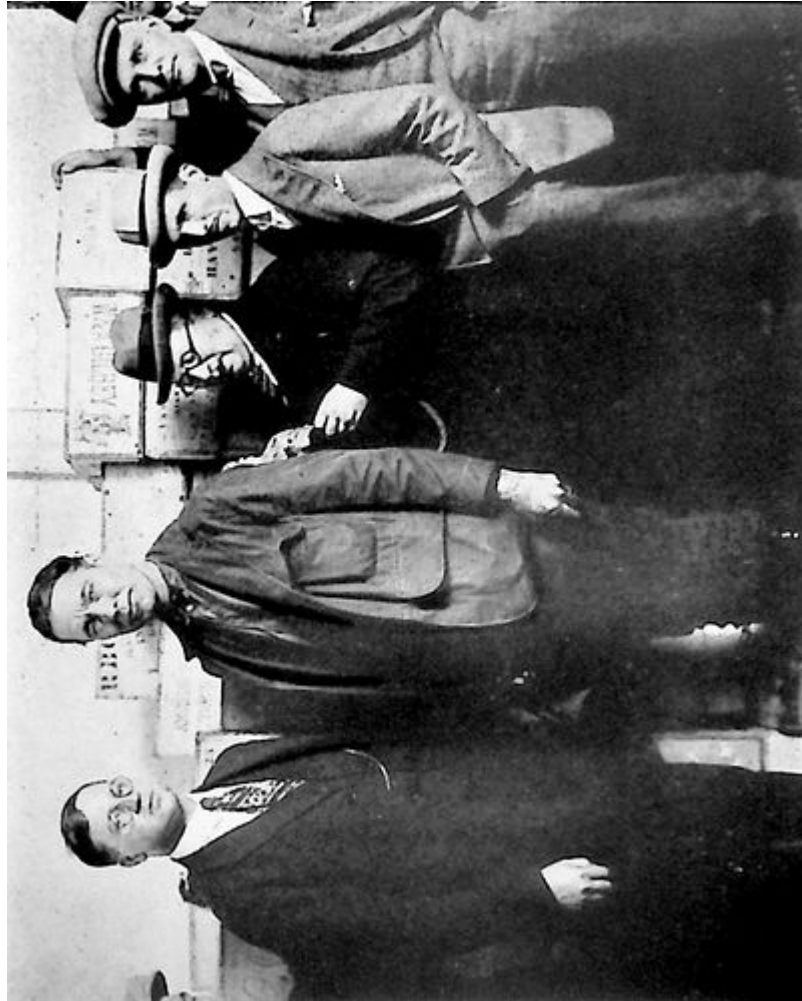
Knowing something about children myself, I took the liberty of pulling back the cover to see if it was a boy or a girl.

It was a gallon—the cutest “tot of whiskey” I ever saw. Half an hour later this baby-carriage and I arrived at the Station

232



The U. S. Commissioner in Mobile and some of the cases
I brought him.



Just after the big raid in Mobile, Alabama.

House accompanied by the old fellow, who was weeping profusely.

Yes, in my experience as a Prohibition agent, I found that a little of everything comes to him who waits. But it wasn't my policy to be content with waiting for things to come to me: I went after them morning, noon, and night. Sometimes including Sundays—because Church people were complaining that the week-ends were the wickedest.

One particular Sunday I went out disguised as a street cleaner, in the regular "White Wing" uniform, and in that one day I scored 71 arrests—including a saloonkeeper whose place on Amsterdam Avenue was right by a church, the members of which had been very indignant about his law-violating. To show them how thoroughly I was on the job, I timed the raid so it would happen just when the congregation was letting out, and could enjoy the fun.

And did they!

Why actually, one lady rushed up to me and, not minding my “White Wing” appearance, gave me a whopping kiss on the cheek.

But I can assure you *that* was something just handed to me, not planned for or against.

CHAPTER XIX

Moist Mobile and Fizzy New Orleans

A LABAMA, under her own state law of 1915, had enjoyed five years' training in dryness when the Big Drought arrived. To be sure, any citizen had a right to import for personal use such things as wine, beer, and whiskey in generously reasonable quantities. But that didn't mean saloons. So when Prohibition stopped all that, there were no bars to shut up; just individual thirsts to cope with.

In the city of Mobile these thirsts must have been of a peculiarly fierce and lawless kind, because by the autumn of 1923 there were a lot of complaints from down there: grocery stores, ice cream parlors and so on being run as "blind tigers." Furthermore it was reported that a sweet ring of politicians were entrenched up to their eyes—and they were all eyes, peeled for anybody daring to butt in on their bootlegging. Some people even hinted that "socially prominent persons,"

234

men who led the cotillions and passed the plate in church, were mixed up in it financially, if no other way. At any rate the state of affairs didn't appeal to the authorities in Washington.

The Commissioner sent for me. He explained the situation and gave me some idea of what we were up against. Told me to go down there and prepare the ground for a worth-while crop of arrests—the way I'd done in Detroit. Only, this was different. In Detroit I had the "big people" with me; here you couldn't be sure who in town was mixed up in what, so the only thing to do was to steer clear of everybody.

Figuring what character would be best for me to assume, I decided on being a silverware salesman. That would account for my non-Southern accent. As for samples to carry, I fortunately had a friend in the business and he fixed me up with a complete line of spoons, forks, and knickknacks. Also some convincing-looking business cards, stationery, and order blanks.

With this outfit I landed in Mobile all set to get business. And it came quick. Hardly was I, with my bags, deposited in a room at

235

a hotel, where I registered under an assumed name—hardly was I inside the door, when a man came offering to sell me liquor. I said, “Sure!” and made a purchase. So here was I, in town less than fifteen minutes and not yet washed up nor settled down, but already in possession of illegal whiskey.

Well, I’d heard of Southern hospitality!

Aside from this act of welcome, no one took much notice of me around the hotel. They had seen traveling salesmen before and catered to them more from a spirit of commerce than from any special fondness for the breed. So nobody cared how much I hustled in and out, nor why.

And I hustled plenty—offering silverware, at half the market price, to all sorts of stores. Premiums for grocery stores to give away that also sold beer (6 per cent stuff). Notions for cigar stores that kept whiskey under the counter. Novelties for pool rooms and candy parlors. Whatever the place happened to be, I could generally make a sale because of my unheard-of prices; and a good order always warranted a bit of business in return. As a result, my bag of samples would soon get heavier with glassware than it was with

236

silver; I’d have to go back to the hotel and empty out. You see, this was a different game from buying drinks at a bar; there all I needed was a fresh vial in my vest, whereas here, where no drinks were served, it had to be a quart or a pint. And such bottles get to be bulky after the first five or six. Consequently, of all the salesmen stopping at the hotel, I was the one that carried the most responsibilities—due to be remarked on if I kept at it much longer.

To dodge that risk and at the same time branch out into new territory—for Mobile is a town of nearly 100,000—I’d go out into the suburbs or down to the docks and find a safe place where I could change my clothes. My most serviceable costume was that of a river-front rustler. I’d get a job with the others there, rustling bunches of bananas off of ships. And if you don’t think that bananas are heavy, just try a bunch sometime! I sweated under them by the hour, getting up the most genuine imitation of a thirst that I ever hope to have.

In working some of the “speaks” and “tigers” in this part of town—and here there were places that served liquor as well as sold

237

it—I had with me an agent younger than I and of slighter build, who had quite a line of stunts. As a team playing up to each other in different kinds of scenes, we gave the bootlegging fraternity a two-man variety show—which they paid for afterwards.

At one place on our circuit he was my son and I, his father, had come along with him to see that he got just one drink and no more. Before everybody present I announced that I was buying it for him on his promise that he'd be content with just that one. In fact, we played the scene so touchingly that a sentimental bar-fly—the kind that laments his misspent life as he gets steweder, and gets steweder as he laments his misspent life—became so affected that he asked tearfully:

“Brother, is ‘n’ inn’cent boy like *him* to be c’rrupted like *us*?”

“I’m keeping my eye on him,” I said, “and that’s all I can do. He refuses to drink milk.”

The man at the bar-like counter gave us a wink, meaning, “Don’t mind the old fool.” And served us.

No such heart-throbs were involved in our performance at a cabaret where we dropped

238

in one evening for a change and a chance of finding something. At first the chance didn’t seem so good: the waiter and the proprietor exchanged whispers about us; they didn’t know whether we were “regular” or not. So we settled that point by my taking a harmonica out of my pocket and playing a jazz tune while Sonny danced a buck and wing. From then on joy and liquor were unconfined, and we were able to carry home something more than a memory of a successful evening.

In humbler haunts a stunt that clicked regularly was for my partner to pose as a young hopeful of the prize ring. I, in the guise of his boastful manager, would offer to bet everybody that the Kid could lick his weight in catamounts, and I’d back up my assertion by offering to buy any doubter a drink on it. And it was wonderful how many skeptics were willing to be convinced in six per cent beer. Or get to be even stronger believers in him on something stronger.

In our conscientiousness we probably staged more drama than was really necessary, so wide open was the town. In a desire to show “Southern hospitality” people made it easy

239

for us to obtain evidence, in the “better” places, that is. What we did have to do was a lot of search work among places that practised their openness in back alleys, cellars, rattletraps, lean-tos and such like. The worst dumps I ever saw! And the worst liquor! There was a kind of bargain stuff called “block-fall” which certainly did live up to its name—you took a drink of it, walked a block, and fell. And from the samples I collected I’d say it was guaranteed.

I likewise invested in some ink—of a kind that no blotter ever sopped up, but Mobilers did. It was being sold at an establishment called The Inkwell which had a nice window display of Blue Black, Jet Black, and other treats for your fountain pen, guaranteed not to clog. Wonderfully natural, you’d say if you were a bookkeeper passing there. But to my Spencerian style of thinking, as I nosed by, the aroma of the free-flowing stuff being dispensed was mighty like something quite different. So I nosed in. And came out shortly after with an addition to the Izzy Einstein Collection of Sample Lots.

The job of getting them home was, as I have told you, more nuisance than poetry.

240

One night in particular I had a close call. I’d just knocked off as a banana-heaver down at the docks, and was heading away from there with a package under my arm, hoping the coast was clear. It seemed to be, until I turned a corner and ran smack into two cops. Two of them.

“What have you got there?” they asked me, eyeing the package.

“Just my lunch,” I said.

That didn’t satisfy them. They seemed to feel that for lunch-carrying I’d chosen a funny hour and the wrong direction—an argument which had considerable truth to it. In fact, I was in a tough spot, with not a leg to stand on.

So I built myself a crutch.

“I been sick to-day,” I told them, with my hand on my stomach. “Just couldn’t eat. So I’m bringing it home sooner than waste it.”

They let me by.

But if they’d been the least little bit more persistent ...! Well, the surprise party I was working on for the government might have been as big a secret as Labor Day.

As it was, “close shaves” of one kind and another got to be too frequent for comfort.

241

At the hotel, particularly, I noticed that people were looking me over in a way they hadn’t before. And you could hardly blame them, for here I was a “salesman” staying on for weeks, and still bobbing in and out at all hours, yet never once making a telephone call. I didn’t dare, for fear somebody might take a notion to listen in on me.

I knew that political influence can do more than a little to upset the best-laid plans, and so I was careful. At any rate, I was getting more and more uneasy, tight situations were piling up on me, I had less and less chance of explaining.

What worried me most was the big trunkful of liquor I had accumulated and was still adding to. All my eggs in one basket! If anything ever happened to *that*, if anybody’s curiosity should get the better of his southern politeness, I’d be just a silverware salesman with a book of orders I couldn’t fill and some genuine, first-hand experience in the art of banana-toting.

It was a possibility I didn’t exactly smack my lips over.

True, my Hope Chest had special locks on it. They contributed a nice air of mystery

242

and I could amuse myself locking and unlocking them, but as far as “protection” went, they were too good an advertisement that the stuff inside was “worth your trouble.” With me away so much of the time, anybody handy with tools would have had no difficulty in copping the works—could have got away with the entire set of teeth that the government was planning to bite with.

Faced with a choice of either spending my time guarding the trunk by sitting on it, or else clearing out of town, I did the latter, taking baggage and me to New Orleans. But I wasn’t done with Mobile. Not by quite a number of places! I just “dwelt” in the Crescent City and commuted back, spending my days Alabamming as per usual and a greater part of my nights riding on trains in between the two cities. The work part went better than the sleep part.

Fortunately I was able to finish up before it finished me, and then we staged our little party.

I had notified Washington when the time was ripe, and they had sent on special United States attorneys and two stenographers to draw up warrants. (The importation of the

243

ladies was due to the thought that local ones might have boy friends in the liquor racket.) Finally, on November 12th, a Pullman load of agents—men gathered from all over the country—arrived in the city after dark, without any suspicions having got out that they were coming. Each of these men received his instructions while still in his berth. He was told where to go, how to get there, and whom to get. And all these raids were to be sprung at the same instant.

Next morning many a Southern waffle and hotcake was allowed to grow cold, as breakfasting Mobilers read of “scores of warrants served” and “prominent Mobile citizens charged with conspiracy to violate the National Prohibition act” and “well-known attorney caught in the toils.”

Statistically speaking there were:

25 arrests on charges of conspiracy to

bribe a government official.

60 arrests for traffic and illegal sale.

\$100,000 worth of liquor seized.

People evidently were not content with reading about it, because by 8 A.M., when the

244

first of the defendants were brought in, the Federal Building on St. Francis Street had become as popular as the Big Tent of a circus. Crowds hung around there all day long, packing the sidewalks and peeking through the bronze gates to watch truck after truck being unloaded inside. There was so much booze brought in that a problem arose as to where in the dickens to put it, the building being more suited for courthouse than warehouse purposes. Finally, though, storing arrangements were prepared in a grand jury room on the third floor, and we piled the stuff in there. And when “all present and accounted for” it made quite a sight. Certainly, if a grand jury

had attempted to convene there after *we* got through, they would have had plenty of cases to sit on.

Incidentally we had caught a shipment coming into town, and the farmer in whose barn it had been stored en route. Also a big still which a colored man had been running, at a place twenty miles outside of town. So, altogether, we hadn't missed much.

With Mobile thus taken care of for the time being, I slipped back, that same day, to New Orleans and signed up for a little solid,

245

stationary sleep at the Roosevelt Hotel. The name I registered under was Schwartz, but for some reason people got to addressing me as McSchwartz, which struck me as such a neat number that I adopted it myself—hoping to make good on it by confiscating some Scotch.

What didn't suit me so well was the fact that the New Orleans newspapers were telling tales out of Mobile, and in a big way, with details of just how the evidence had been gathered. Which meant that if, as reported, the bootleggers in Mobile had been left sadder, the ones here were being put wiser by accounts of that affair; these accounts featuring my name and hinting that I was now in New Orleans ready to unpack my bag of tricks.

As a sort of delicate attention, one of the newspapers, called *The Item*, decided to relieve me of what little secrecy I had left. They sent up a camera man to take a picture of me. But I saw him first. And when he approached me in the lobby of the hotel suggesting that I step outside where the light was better, I stepped outside all right, but through a different door—leaving word that

246

I hoped the gentleman wouldn't mind my keeping him waiting.

But he was smarter than I figured, and he trailed me.

A couple of hours later I hear, "Taxi, sir?" as I'm coming out of a restaurant, in another part of town, which I skipped to for a beefsteak medium rare with no cameras. There's a cab drawn up at the curb. I'm about to take it when out pops a jack-in-the-box. And *click!* he takes me.

Said he hadn't minded waiting at all.

The publication of this photograph gave all the law-violators in town a swell chuckle at my expense—the sort of ha ha that mice are said to

indulge in when they hear that the cat has been belled. Now they'd be able to "see me coming," and it would be impossible to fool them.

Maybe. But my previous experience with members of the human race—and especially with the saloonkeeper in Brooklyn of whom I twice bought liquor after he had pasted up my picture over his bar—made me feel that there was *still* a chance to do some business in New Orleans.

In fact, I was so sure of it that I recklessly

247

(you might say) accepted an invitation from the New Orleans Stage Hands Society to attend their annual ball, along with Mme. Rosa Ponselle and other "visiting celebrities." At that affair I was introduced under my own name, and hundreds of people saw me plainly enough to know me forever after.

Yet the very next morning a bootlegger approached me offering a good buy in liquor.

"You certainly know how to pick 'em," I told him. "All you need is to pick horses instead of people, and your fortune is made."

At three restaurants I even mentioned my name—applying for a job as a waiter: said I was from New York and had cleared out because "that damn Izzy Einstein" had ruined the night club business and "put us waiters out of work." It didn't get me a job at any of the three places. But I got the evidence I was after.

Generally, though, I just walked in and bought. And they gave me splendid cooperation. For instance early one morning at a soft drink emporium on Royal Street I had the experience (same as I'd met with in other places in other cities) of asking for beer and being advised not to drink beer at that hour,

248

but to take whiskey. And I'll say I took it!

At that, there was still plenty left to pick from in a city which had, according to rumor, 2,500 places violating the law. Personally I didn't count them, I just visited and collected, in the manner of the busy bee. Getting ready to sting later.

One thing about the Crescent City situation was that, as compared with Mobile, there was more de luxe drinking, along with the other kind. Consequently, besides my usual banana-carrying and similar riverfront jobs

(gosh, how I learned to hate the sight of fruit!) I had some tuxedo work to do in the evenings.

To break into it right, I invited myself to lunch at a select luncheon club where, posing as a wealthy brewer, I got acquainted with some of the best terrapin eaters and roll-carriers. Sitting in on a little pinochle with them I learned what was what in New Orleans in the line of smart haunts for spenders who didn't care whether school kept or not.

With this information and accompanied by some "friends," including members of the nose-powdering sex, I butter-and-egged my way through the Tango Belt (as it was called) and played the high-flying sucker out in the

249

West End suburban district where fire-water flowed beside the law-abiding waters of Lake Pontchartrain. But the prize place was a genteel joint called The Little Club. Here the hooch was so refined that it was put on the table in a cologne bottle.

Results? Well, not quite as big as in Mobile. *There* we had sprung our Complete Surprise with a carload of simultaneousness. Here it was a cinch to get evidence, but to nail New Orleans shut was something else again. Too many tip-offs and too few agents to raid in a big way.

What I and my associates did accomplish was to throw a good healthy scare into the business. Within three days after my arrival the arrests I made resulted, according to newspaper estimates, in a 75 per cent falling off in patronage and profits. And the price of the stuff went up. For example a café I went back to a second time charged me 60 cents for whiskey instead of the 25 cents I had paid before; the bartender apologizing by saying that "that fellow Izzy Einstein" was making things difficult. It peeved them particularly that this should be the case with Thanksgiving coming on, a time when the

250

"holiday spirit" is apt to be dealt in on a large scale.

Somehow the thought of that "time of celebration" prompted me to turn my eyes up the river toward Memphis. I decided that maybe a little excursion might do us both good—Memphis and me. So I took a run up there for the week-end, scoring 27 arrests and leaving more than 50 forget-me-nots to be served by local agents. It was a drought and a panic at the

same time. To quote what one of the local papers said about it, I had taken all the thanks out of Thanksgiving for the bootleggers.

My departure from New Orleans, a week later, was announced in the *Times Picayune* with a cartoon that showed me walking off, bag in hand, leaving a fellow labeled “New Orleans” perched on a water wagon. Hiding behind it, a scared bootlegger is asking, “Izzy gone yet?” And the fellow on the water wagon, watching me disappear, is saying, “Sssh!”

Very funny. But I was back in New Orleans in time for the Christmas alcoholidays. And I saw to it that this fellow was back on his perch.

CHAPTER XX

Hops and Skips

FROM New Orleans I went to El Paso. Stopped there only a few days, but long enough to do some sleuthing as a Mexican laborer (which involved me in language trouble) and also as a wealthy cattleman in sombrero and barber-pole shirt.

Next it was Los Angeles. On the train out to the Coast I was riding on the observation platform when a man sitting next to me pulled out a flask and offered me a drink. "You don't have to be afraid of it," he said. "It's good stuff."

I told him I never drank on trains; they upset my stomach. But I didn't make any trouble for him, as he wasn't a bootlegger. Besides, the most conscientious agent likes to take a rest from work *sometimes*. And I had Los Angeles ahead of me.

Arrived there I posed as a heavy sport and got a pretty good line on the liquor situation there, finding that stuff was scarcer and

252

dearer than in the East. The Los Angeles papers found out I was in town, and law-violators were watching out; but I bought just the same. Visiting Hollywood, I was grabbed by one of the producers who asked me to give some professional suggestions about the details of a barroom scene that was being shot. I looked the set over and O.K'd it as being what a ginmill looked like if I was any judge. But I kept on the job in Los Angeles—though telling the newspaper reporters I was "just in town for a rest." I'd have been ready to spring something big, if orders from headquarters hadn't called me back East.

When the train stopped in Kansas City, a bunch of reporters nailed me; consequently Chicago got tipped off that I was heading there. But I was in the Windy City only long enough to catch a train for New York.

Rolling into Grand Central Station at last, I sure was glad to be back. I'd been gone for months—covering territory as far south as Mobile, and all the way West.

But when I got to my home in Ridge Street prepared to settle back in an easy chair and catch my breath, I found a message that a bunch of trials resulting from my raids in

Detroit were just going to come up there. I must catch the next train. So back I went.

These trials proved to be pretty lively. While I was waiting to testify, somebody greeted me by name and immediately such a crowd gathered, that I had to be taken into an inner office to avoid causing a stampede of curiosity seekers. In court one of the defense lawyers, ignoring the fact that my standing as an agent was pretty well recognized (as this demonstration proved), asked me if I was positive I could identify whiskey. I said I certainly could. But he tried to worry me—and didn't succeed. Finally the judge took a hand, with:

“If a farmer came into my court and said a potato was a potato I would take his word for it and not quibble over how he knew it or could prove it, or ask him how long he had been farming. The same goes for Mr. Einstein. He knows what whiskey is, and he knows that this sample is what he calls it, plain ‘hooch,’ otherwise, colored spirits.”

His Honor also had some clear-cut things to say about our old friend Hamtramck, where, among the many places I'd pinched, one happened to be right next door to Hamtramck's

police headquarters. He said that the most appropriate memorial that city could ever erect would be a complete set of padlocks.

Moving on to Chicago, I found the bootleggers there had been tipped off that I was coming. To fix me they had hired private detectives to shadow me every instant. But I fooled them. As an Italian laborer in ragged clothes I visited cheap dumps until the shadowers began to get wise to me; then I switched to being an opera singer—long cloak and everything—and visited some high-class German places. Meanwhile an agent I had teamed up with me, and who wasn't being trailed, was getting still better results on tips I was giving him.

A few days of that, and I had to dash down South to be a witness in New Orleans and Mobile. Papers in many different cities were reporting I was “seen” or “expected.” And often it was true. In Atlanta I went into a confectionery store and asked to buy some candy for a lady. Explained that it was for a widow, and that I wouldn't be offering her anything as tame as candy if this wasn't a dry town and I a stranger in it. Right away

he offered to fix me up with a pint so as not to disappoint the lady.

In Washington it was a whole hour after I arrived there before I could succeed in buying liquor. But Baltimore was a cinch. All I had to do was get on a street car and ask the conductor to let me off at a place where I could get a drink. He pointed one out to me almost the first block. And I got the drink.

Finally returning home late in December, I thought that *now* maybe I'd have a chance to take it easy a minute. And what did I find *this* time? Why, I found that the landlord was laying for me—wanting to raise my rent from \$14 a month to \$16. But I protested, and newspapers all over the country took my side against him. Anyhow I won and didn't pay the two-dollar raise. But the controversy sort of stirred me up, so I was in fit shape to go upstate and catch saloons in Syracuse and other cities before staging big stuff for New Year's Eve on Broadway.

And so it went.

I can think of fifty easier ways of earning a very moderate salary than the way *I* earned it. I worked all sorts of hours of the day

256

and night; I traveled more thousands of miles than I can figure; I carried a portable typewriter everywhere I went and made out detailed reports. As to the total quantity of booze I confiscated, I couldn't begin to estimate it. But I can tell you this, the official records showed that during my years as a Federal agent I scored or participated in *more than twenty per cent of all arrests made in the Lower New York District*. And that doesn't include what I scored on my trips.

Maybe I exceeded my quota too much. Maybe I trod on toes that were supposed to be protected. I don't know. But I'm frank to admit that my activity and my results didn't make the records of some of the other agents look any too good. Consequently there was hard feeling.

At any rate I was "offered" a transfer to Chicago. But as my home was in New York, and as I preferred to spend the rest of my days on Ridge Street until I died there, because I liked the neighborhood—well, I turned down the "offer." And thereby fired myself.

257

CHAPTER XXI

Conclusion (Or Draw Your Own)

I READ in the newspapers that some of the big brewers are talking about getting ready to open up in the near future, and that certain restaurant interests are buying wines abroad so as to be all set for the return of wetness.

Are they kidding the public or just themselves?

If you'd like the opinion of a fellow who used to be in the enforcement service and who has kept posted since, I'd say, as I said in my preface: Prohibition is here to stay. The Amendment will not be repealed, in our lifetime at least. And drinking is growing less.

The proof of it is the cheapness of liquor. During the first couple of years the price was high. People paid 35 cents to a dollar a drink for whiskey, and it was \$100 to \$125 a case. To-day a gallon of alcohol can be had for \$2. Whiskey, as low as \$30 a case. Gin

258

is plentiful at 75 cents to a dollar a bottle. And whiskey by the glass is from five cents up.

At such prices the industry isn't making any money to speak of. I know "millionaire bootleggers" who to-day are broke. It's a buyers' market, with more stuff offered than there is demand for. And it's better stuff than formerly. In the old days before Prohibition saloonkeepers never thought of having stuff analyzed, and they sold lots of "rot-gut." To-day they have to analyze everything. And *still* they can't sell enough to make a living. The great majority are just dragging along. It's an over-expanded industry that is due for a shrinkage, if not a collapse.

As for the claim that Repeal would put a lot of people to work, what about the people who are employed now? I'd estimate the number of speakeasies in New York City at around 100,000 (yes, I know this figure is more than double what the experts and authorities have guessed); and for every "speak" you can reckon about five people employed, either in the place itself or in supplying the stuff. Which means about half a million.

259

Are all those people going to electioneer for Repeal? And if Repeal *should* come, would they all get jobs in breweries?

I think not.

As regards the difficulties of enforcement, they are almost entirely a question of personnel. I read that Prohibition Director Woodcock has had to fire a lot of agents in New Jersey because they weren't making enough arrests, and that hereafter any man who doesn't score eight a month will be below the quota and will get fired.

Eight arrests a month! And in Jersey!

I worked under half a dozen or more Prohibition Directors (they were always changing them), and any month I couldn't have scored eight arrests in my sleep—well, all I say is to remind you I scored as many as 71 in one day. And eight or ten brought in by the time I reported for work at 9 A.M. was nothing unusual.

The other difficulty about agents seems to be that they lose their heads and abuse their power. Like that trouble up in Alexandria Bay where the whole town got sore. I can assure you that that sort of situation is entirely unnecessary and uncalled for. In my work I

260

never resorted to violence, never got flustered and called out the police or the state troopers, never pulled a gun on anybody. I showed I meant business, that was all. And I let the fellows I arrested see that I was a human being. They were gamblers who had been playing a bum game against the government and they had lost. In some cases the seizures I made spelled financial ruin for them. Whatever the details, there was no occasion for maltreating them. Easy does it!

I know what incompetent agents are like because we had some on our staff and they got fired. One of these lame ducks later wrote me a letter saying he was running for alderman and wouldn't I please send him a campaign contribution.

I sent him a banknote for 100,000 German marks—old style. (I'd bought a bale of them off a pushcart.) He was defeated.

As for me, I'm making a much better living than I did when I was working for the government. And getting more sleep. I'm in the insurance business—special representative of the New York Life. Yes, sir! What was good enough for ex-President Coolidge is good enough for ex-Agent Izzy Einstein.

